

socialist standard



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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

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Same as the old Boss

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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 17 January** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
tel: 020 7622 3811
e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial Capitalism Must Go

We are now in the middle of the biggest economic and financial crisis since the 1930s. In a world that has the potential to produce enough food, clothes, housing and the other amenities of life for all, factories are closing down, workers are being laid off, unemployment is growing, houses are being repossessed and people are having to tighten their belts. There are in fact already 16 million officially recorded unemployed in the EU. Outside Europe the situation is worse and people are rioting because they can't afford even the basic necessities of life.

Capitalism in relative "good" times is bad enough, but capitalism in an economic crisis makes it plain for all to see that it is not a system geared to meeting people's needs. It's a system based on the pursuit of profits, where the harsh economic law of "no profit, no production" prevails. It's because the headlong pursuit of profits has led to a situation where they can't make profits at the same rate as before that those who own and control the places where wealth is produced have gone on strike – refusing to allow these workplaces to be used to produce what people need, some desperately. So, as in the 1930s, it's poverty in the midst of potential plenty again. Cutbacks in production alongside unmet needs. Why should we put up with this?

But that's the way capitalism works, and must work. The politicians in charge of governments don't really know what to do, not that they can do much to change the situation anyway.

They are just hoping that the panic measures they have taken will work. In Britain the Labour government is trying to spend its way out of the slump, but this has been tried before and has never worked. The slump will only end when conditions for profitable production have been recreated, and that requires real wages to fall and unprofitable firms to go out of business. So, there's no way that bankruptcies, cut-backs and lay-offs are going to be avoided, whatever governments do.

What can be done? Nothing within the profit system. It can't be mended, so it must be ended. But this is something we must do ourselves. The career politicians, with their empty promises and futile measures, can't do anything for us. We need to organise to bring in a new system where goods and services are produced to meet people's needs. But we can only produce what we need if we control the places where this is produced. So these must be taken out of the hands of the rich individuals, private companies and states that now control them and become the common heritage of all, under our democratic control. In short, socialism in its original sense (which has nothing to do with the failed state capitalism that used to exist in Russia or with what still exists in China and Cuba) as a society of common ownership, democratic control and production for use not profit, with goods and services available on the basis of "from each according to ability, to each according to needs".



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Ready, aim... Press Enter

You'll know by now whether the UK retail industry's fear of the worst Christmas profits for 30 years came true or not. Hopefully workers can draw some comfort from the thought of all those skinned fat cats and broke brokers, though it's little enough comfort when you're wondering which of your children to sell to pay the stupendous gas bill this winter.

Ever ready with expensive and impractical solutions most workers will never be able to afford unless they win the Lottery, *New Scientist* suggests we all go off the grid (5 December). Certainly, given suitable location and a few tens of thousands of pounds, you can install your own wind, water, solar and geothermal systems and forever laugh in the face of price increases and power outages. But when you can't even afford a bit of miserable lagging in your loft, such helpful suggestions don't cut much ice off the inside of your windows.

Still, for the rich among us who matter, there's another reason for turning your stately pile into a self-sufficient domestic fortress with solar-powered electric fences and heat-seeking laser turrets. If the current economic downturn keeps going down, and the unemployment figures keep going up, you'll be wanting to do more than keep the heat in. You'll be wanting to keep the poor out.

Could things get that bad? Well, quite possibly. The world is going through a process of technological

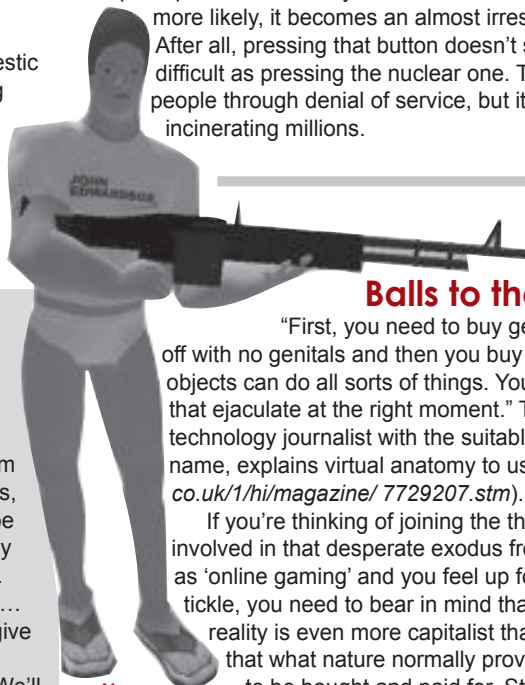


convergence which globalisation and the information revolution are making possible. In itself this might be a good thing, and would greatly assist in the establishment of global non-market socialism. But this is capitalism we're talking about, and one should never underestimate its ability to turn a triumph into a disaster.

The very fact of convergence means that not only are the world's financial systems vulnerable to cyber-attack, but so are its power systems. One concerted hack offensive could stop an entire country in its tracks and turn all its lighting and heating off. Needless to say, the rich man in his self-sufficient castle won't be bothered, but pity the poor man at his gate.

Yet surely nobody would commit such a monumental act of vandalism? Oh really? Guess again. China, it seems, have been sponsoring hacker groups for years, for the purposes of espionage and industrial sabotage against rivals, and are arguably in a position to paralyse the UK or USA (*Guardian*, 21 November). At a time when global trends are pointing to the decline of US unipolar dominance and the emergence of multipolar power factions, cyber-attack of this sort is not only more likely, it becomes an almost irresistible option.

After all, pressing that button doesn't seem half so difficult as pressing the nuclear one. True, you may kill people through denial of service, but it's not as if you're incinerating millions.



Balls to the Gamers

"First, you need to buy genitals. You start off with no genitals and then you buy some. These objects can do all sorts of things. You can have ones that ejaculate at the right moment." Thus Adrian Mars, technology journalist with the suitably other-worldly name, explains virtual anatomy to us (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7729207.stm>).

If you're thinking of joining the throngs of people involved in that desperate exodus from reality known as 'online gaming' and you feel up for a bit of slap and tickle, you need to bear in mind that escapist virtual reality is even more capitalist than capitalism, and that what nature normally provides for free has to be bought and paid for. Still, at least you get to choose size, colour and special functions.

Be warned though, this kind of cyber hanky-panky has already resulted in one real-world divorce, as Mrs Avatar 'walked' in to find Mr Avatar on the sofa with Ms Streetwalker Avatar polishing his proud purchase. But then, the aforementioned couple met and married in the first place via an online chat-room, so perhaps there is a kind of internal symmetry going on after all. When you think online gamers can't get any sillier, they do. If only all that imagination could be turned back towards the physical world, where the real balls-ups are taking place.



Note Imperfect

Strange but true, a binman on his rounds found two bins stuffed with £10,000 in £10 and £20 notes, the bizarre catch being that they were all cut up into one-inch pieces (*BBC Online Magazine*, 5 December). What was needed, explained a self-styled puzzle expert, was a scientific system

to reassemble the notes, which the binman will be allowed to keep, as they have not been claimed. "When I read the story ... I was very tempted to give him a call and offer my help", said the expert. We'll just bet he was.

Apparently note destruction is not unusual, and every year the Bank of England receives returned notes to the value of £40 million, which have been burned, water-damaged, defaced, ripped, cut, chewed or eaten. Is there some campaign of money vandalism going on that we don't know about? Be that as it may, our scientific advice to workers would be slightly different from the puzzle expert's. Why not start the New Year by cutting up all the other notes too, and not bothering to stick them together?



Taxing Problem

Dear Editors

In "My Cupboard is Bare" (Letters, *Socialist Standard*, November) the letter writer states many inaccuracies - "he doubled the income-tax burden on the poorest earners in society." - "The working-poor, whose income-tax he doubled, do not bother to vote, (as he knows) for we, the low-paid, realise that there is no-one worth voting for." - "Middle-England, on middle incomes, voted Labour into power, and for that voting-base income-tax was reduced in an attempt to retain support for the Labour." - "If the British government makes yet another "mistake" of having ordinary hard-working British citizens bail-out British banks and the greedy millionaires who helped cause the problem...". This might be worthy of comment.

GLASGOW BRANCH

Reply:

We published the letter as an expression of opinion by a discontented worker. We agree that it is inaccurate to imply that income tax is a burden on the working class and that it is workers who are bailing out the banks.

Workers are exploited at the point of production but are paid more or less the value of the working skills they sell, i.e., enough to buy what they need to reproduce and replace them. If the government imposes a tax on wages, this will eventually, after a struggle, be passed on to employers as the cost of reproducing the workers' skills will have gone up.

In any event, in Britain, most workers don't even personally pay income tax as they do other taxes by going to the post office or writing a cheque as this is deducted at source by the employer and paid by them to the government. In this case what

is important is take-home pay. This said, when the government does change income tax the take-home pay of some individual workers can go up or down for a time, and did go down in the case the letter writer mentioned.

Although the money to bail out the banks will have ultimately come out of the surplus value extracted from the working class, it has not done so directly - the capitalist employer extracts the surplus value, part of which is paid to the government as taxes, some of which was used to bail out the banks - Editors.

Socialist Standard

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In place of Capitalism

Recently the word 'capitalism' seems to be on everyone's lips. The main reason for this is probably that capitalism - also known as 'the economy' or 'the market system' is going through a bad patch. The Labour government's claim to have ended the cycle of boom and bust has been proved disastrously wrong. The last boom, during which food, energy, house and stock market prices rose at unsustainably high rates, has given way to bust.

As usual, workers are the main victims. Many of us have lost our jobs, can't get new ones or can't enter the labour force for the first time. We have seen our outgoings soar, our incomes squeezed, even our homes repossessed. Even if we have so far personally avoided the worst of these fates, the worry that we may not continue to do so can be very stressful.

Who or what is to blame for this sorry state of affairs? More constructively, how can it be put right? Only the pitifully small socialist media insist that we need to replace capitalism with socialism. All the other media, which shout so much louder than we can, say things like "We've got the wrong kind of capitalism" or "Some people (bankers) have been too greedy."

There is a widespread and heavily promoted belief that 'capitalism is the only game in town.' Anyone who disputes this, for example by advocating that all goods and services should be available on the basis of need, not ability to pay, is dismissed as idealistic or utopian. It is a classic case of self-fulfilling prophecy: support (or at least acquiesce in) the way

things are organised today and tomorrow will be more or less the same. But it doesn't *have* to be.

Socialists urge that it is futile to try to reform capitalism - the whole system needs to be scraped and replaced by something better. As we explain in our pamphlet *Socialism as a Practical Alternative*, this means being as constructive as possible, not destructive. For example, such bodies as the World Health Organisation and the Universal Postal Union can be adapted for socialist purposes.

We have as our object the establishment of socialism. In a sense this is true, but we also talk about a socialist *movement* in the here and now. Every month we say in this journal 'we are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism.' We distribute paper and electronic publications, give talks, take part in debates, run educational events, make films, and much more.

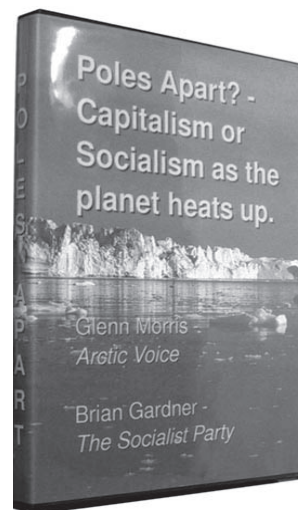
With more members - and particularly active members - we could do things and on a scale we are prevented from doing for lack of human and other resources. For example, we could set up socialist publishing houses producing, promoting and distributing paper and electronic literature. We could organise socialist educational networks at different levels: schools, colleges, universities, distance learning - for potential socialist citizenship, not capitalist employment. Other activities will no doubt be suggested, tried out and perhaps become widespread - who knows?

The point is that more of us will come to realise that we *all* live in the real world, not with submission to endure it but with imagination to revolutionise it.

STAN PARKER

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Congo – The mobile phone war

Although the peace accord of 2003 ended five years of war in other parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fighting has continued intermittently in the eastern Kivu region. The latest bout began on October 25, when the rebel forces of Laurent Nkunda resumed their offensive, accompanied by the usual atrocities against civilians, burning villages, and floods of starving refugees.

What is this war about?

Spillover from Rwanda?

At first sight, it looks like spillover from the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in neighbouring Rwanda. General Nkunda, a Congolese Tutsi and Christian fundamentalist, says he is protecting his people from the Interahamwe, the Hutu militia that perpetrated the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and later fled over the border. He is backed by troops of the current Tutsi government of Rwanda, which the Interahamwe seeks to overthrow.

This version is a smokescreen. Nkunda has shown much less interest in pursuing the Interahamwe than in seizing control of Kivu's rich mineral resources – partly on behalf of Rwandan business interests, partly perhaps for his own enrichment. He exploits the memory of genocide to mobilize the Tutsis in his support and win foreign sympathy, much as Israel exploits the memory of the Holocaust for its purposes. Control over resources is also the main concern of the Congo government in Kinshasa and its armed forces.

The most valuable minerals in the Kivu region are two metallic ores called cassiterite and coltan. These contain substances whose special properties are ideally suited to various high-tech applications. Niobium alloys are used in jet and rocket engines because they remain stable at very high temperatures, while tantalum and tin oxide are used in making electronic circuitry for devices ranging from computers to DVD players and MRI scanners. In particular, the rapidly rising demand for mobile phones has pushed up the price of coltan, fuelling the fight to control and mine its deposits. So we could call the war in eastern Congo “the mobile phone war.”

On both sides, part of the proceeds from selling resources (through chains of middlemen) on the world market goes to finance military operations, which in turn secure access to the resources. This is an example of the “war as business” model (Material World, November 2008), which arises in this case from the weakness of state institutions in Central Africa.

A helpless giant

In the Congo it is especially difficult for the government to exercise sovereignty over “its” territory, which is roughly the area of Western Europe (2.34 million km²). The transportation and communications infrastructure is extremely underdeveloped; no road or rail link traverses the whole country from east to west. Under these conditions, it is quite impossible to defend borders with nine neighbours that stretch over 10,744 km.

Neighbouring states can therefore invade Congo

territory whenever they like. No fewer than seven foreign armies fought in the “civil” war that began in 1998. In the background, the old colonial powers – France, Belgium and Britain – and two players newer to the region, the United States and China, jockey for position, assiduously promoting the interests of their corporations while carefully concealing how these corporations hire private armies and fuel the conflict. All these governments, armies and corporations are after the same things, the vast resources that lie on – and especially under – Congolese soil: various metals, diamonds, uranium, potash, timber, wildlife, oil and gas, etc.

Then there are the “peacekeeping” forces of the United Nations, even though there is no peace to keep. The

real reason for their deployment is, in fact, to protect the interests of French and other foreign capital. It is this that explains the apparently odd fact that most of the “peacekeepers” are kept well away from the areas affected by the current fighting. Those who do enter the combat zone make no effort to assist relief work or protect civilians, who vent their anger by yelling and throwing stones at the UN vehicles.

Torn apart by rival predators, there is a striking parallel between today's Congo and another “helpless giant” – China in the second half of the

19th and first half of the 20th century.

A curse not a blessing

In a different system of society, many resources in central Africa could be utilized for the purpose of ecologically sustainable development for the benefit of local communities. The natural products of the rainforest could be preserved and harvested for dietary and medicinal use. There is a vast potential for hydroelectricity and, of course, solar power.

But in a capitalist world Congo's resources have been a curse not a blessing for the overwhelming majority of its people, bringing them invasion, enslavement, starvation, war and upheaval. European capital first descended on the country in 1885 in the horrific form of the Congo Free State, a corporate state controlled personally by King Leopold II of Belgium, who made money from it by exporting rubber collected under compulsion by the indigenous people. Those who failed to meet their quotas were mutilated; those who refused to work for the conquerors were killed.

This reign of terror, which would have done the Nazis proud, led to a population loss of some ten million (see Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*). How many people must have wished that their country had no rubber!

In 1908 the Congo Free State gave way to the Belgian Congo, which gained formal independence in 1960. Mobutu's kleptocracy followed in 1971 and lasted until 1997, when the recent period of upheaval began. Regimes come and go, but the ravenous extraction of resources by foreign corporations never stops.

STEFAN



Congolese Tutsi and Christian fundamentalist General Nkunda

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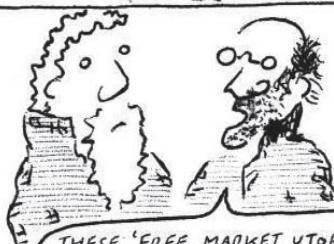


IS THIS THE MUCH HERALDED FINAL CRISIS OF CAPITALISM?...

WELL, IT COULD HAVE BEEN. AND LEFT TO THE CAPITALISTS THEMSELVES, IT WOULD. BUT, THE 'NANNY STATE', MUCH REVILED BY RIGHT WINGERS, COMES TO THE RESCUE, AND BAILS OUT THE FAT CAT BANKERS.



AH, THE DELICIOUS IRONY!! 'BIG GOVERNMENT'... THAT INSTITUTION THAT IDEALISTIC FREE MARKETEERS DESPISE, COMES ALONG AND SAVES GLOBAL CAPITALISM WITH THOSE ENDLESS BILLIONS OF TAXPAYER'S MONEY.



BUT, NOW WE KNOW IT SIMPLY DOESN'T WORK, AND COULDN'T WORK. YOU NEED THE STATE TO BE THERE TO UNDERWRITE YOU, BAIL YOU OUT, ACT AS THE FINAL GUARANTOR, BE THE BOTTOM LINE. THOSE BANKERS REMIND ME OF TEENAGERS, WHO HAVING LEFT HOME AND DECLARED THEIR INDEPENDENCE, RUN UP HUGE CREDIT CARD BILLS AND HAVE TO GO CRAWLING BACK TO MUM AND DAD, CAP IN HAND.



THESE 'FREE MARKET UTOPIANS' HAVE LONG ENVISAGED A WORLD OF BIG BUSINESS OPERATING TOTALLY FREE OF THE STATE, WITH ALL ITS NASTY RULES AND REGULATIONS, RED TAPE, TAXES... THE STATE HOLDS BUSINESS BACK... WITHOUT ITS DEAD HAND, THE POTENTIAL OF THE FREE MARKET IS LIMITLESS. SO THE THEORY GOES.



AND THE WHOLE IDEA OF FREE MARKET CAPITALISM BEING SOME SORT OF ULTRA EFFICIENT, SELF CORRECTING MECHANISM HAS BEEN SHOWN TO BE UTTERLY UNTRUE BY THE EVENTS OF THE LAST YEAR. NOT THAT WE EVER SWALLOWED THAT PONY. BUT MILLIONS DID!



AND SO, MILLIONS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE LOOK AT CORRUPT, INCOMPETENT BANKERS, LOOK AT THE CASINO-CUM-BETTING SHOP CULTURE OF THE STOCK MARKETS, AND WONDER, SHOULD WE LET THESE GUYS DECIDE OUR FUTURE?



TIMES ARE CHANGING! THOSE REDNECK REPUBLICANS WHO TRIED TO SLUR BARACK OBAMA AS A 'SOCIALIST' (IF ONLY!) JUST SHOWED HOW DESPERATE THE RIGHT HAS BECOME. THEY KNOW TIMES RUNNING OUT FOR THAT WHOLE POST-KEYNSIAN FREE MARKET ERA. EVEN THE LABOUR PARTY INCREASE TAX ON THE RICH!



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ANOTHER "EXPERT" RECANTS

"Alistair Darling will be forced to admit tomorrow that the credit crunch has plunged Britain into a deep recession, and the economy will contract for a full year in 2009, for the first time since the early Nineties. As the credit crisis ravaged the world's financial markets earlier this year, the Chancellor insisted repeatedly that Britain's 'economic fundamentals' were sound. In the budget six months ago, he pencilled in a strong recovery for 2009." (*Observer*, 23 November)

GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICE

"The European Union accused drug companies on Friday of adding billions of dollars to health care costs by delaying or blocking the sale of less expensive generic medicines. One common tactic, said Neelie Kroes, the European competition commissioner, was for drug companies to amass patents to protect active ingredients in the medicines — in one case, 1,300 patents for a single drug. Another tactic, she said, was for pharmaceutical companies to sue the makers of generic drugs for ostensible patent violations, which tended to delay the availability of the lower-cost products for years. Ms. Kroes made her comments Friday while presenting the preliminary findings of a broad investigation into accusations of anticompetitive practices in the drug sector. She also turned her sights on the generics companies, which she said had received \$200 million from pharmaceutical companies over seven years in exchange for holding their products off the market." (*New York Times*, 28 November)

ANOTHER EXPERT SPEAKS

"This week Citigroup's already depressed shares have lost half their value, and shares of Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase are down 30 percent. Those declines have come despite reassuring comments from Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson Jr., who told National Public Radio a week ago that people were no longer worried about the possibility of a major bank failure. 'I've got to tell you,' he said. 'I think our major institutions have been stabilized. I believe that very strongly.' The Standard & Poor's index of 500 stocks fell by more than 6 percent on two consecutive days, Wednesday and Thursday, something that had not happened since July 20 and 21, 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, when panic was brought on by collapsing commodity prices. Such prices have fallen rapidly this week as well, as evidence mounted of a world recession." (*New York Times*, 20 November)

WORLD HUNGER GROWS

"It is the new face of hunger. A perfect storm of food scarcity, global warming, rocketing oil prices and the world population explosion is plunging humanity into the biggest crisis of the 21st century by pushing up food prices and spreading hunger and poverty from rural areas into cities. Millions more of the world's most vulnerable people are facing starvation as food shortages loom and crop prices spiral ever upwards. And for the first time in history, say experts, the impact is spreading from the developing to the developed world. More than 73 million people in 78 countries that depend on food handouts from the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) are facing reduced rations this year. The increasing scarcity of food is the biggest crisis looming for the world", according to WFP officials." (*Sunday Herald*, 30 November)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Sekforde Arms, London. EC1 (Nearest Underground: Farringdon).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 8th and 22nd. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

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Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

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Cooking the Books 1

D-words

D is for Depression. And for Deflation. Two words economists and journalists tried to banish. The first they replaced by the more innocuous-sounding "recession" while the second was confined to history books. But now they are having to use them again.

The Penguin *Dictionary of Economics* defines "depression" as "a business cycle in which there is unemployment" and then adds:

"Only the period 1929-33 in the United Kingdom is usually referred to as a depression (see Recession)".

Well, it looks as if they may have to add "and the period 2008- ", especially as even the Bank of England has raised the spectre of "deflation", by which they mean a period of falling money prices.

The Bank of England's remit is to keep the rate of the rise in the general price level (popularly called the rate of inflation, misleadingly since the rise in the general price level is an effect of inflation properly so called) down to 2 percent a year. The main cause of its non-stop rise since 1940 has been the overissue, or "inflation", of the currency, which has gone on incessantly since then, and which will have increased with the government's recent bail-out of the banks and attempt to spend its way out of the coming depression.

When, however, in November the Bank dramatically slashed the bank rate from 4.5 percent to 3 percent it justified this, in terms of its remit, on the ground that the members of its Monetary Policy Committee felt (actually, took a gamble or guessed) that a rise in the general price level as a result of the inflation of the currency would be outweighed by a fall in it as a result of the depression, so that it still wouldn't increase by more than 2 percent.

If there is no inflation of the currency then, in a depression, the general price level will tend to fall because paying demand falls (due to bad business conditions and to less income from employment) relative to supply (saturated markets following overproduction). This is what happened throughout the 19th century at the time that Marx was writing and, again, in the depression of the 1930s. In fact, one of the proposals that brought down the 1929 Labour government in 1931 was to cut the salaries of civil servants as well as the dole in line with falling prices. But this was not deflation in the proper sense since this is a cut-back in the issue of the currency, such as was done in 1920 when £66 million worth of currency notes were taken out of circulation and the general price level fell by 30 per cent.

Keynes in his *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* that came out in 1936 offering an explanation for the depression, devoted a whole chapter to "Changes in Money-Wages". While rejecting the view of other capitalist economists that pushing wages down was the way-out of a slump, he accepted that in a slump real wages (what they can buy) would go down but argued that it was better to do this by keeping money-wages stable while allowing the general price level to rise (through inflating the currency). As he put it:

"A movement by employers to revise money-wage bargaining downward will be much more strongly resisted than a gradual and automatic lowering of real wages as a result of rising prices".

If there really is a fall in the general price level that outweighs the effects of inflation, then wages, as a price (that of workers' ability to work, or labour-power), will tend to fall too. If they didn't fall, or not as much as prices, then workers in employment would be better off since they could buy more with their money than before. Some commentators have mentioned falling money-wages as a possibility, but have not dwelt on this too long.

If it does happen, then workers will have to struggle to limit the damage, which as Keynes pointed out, they will do "more strongly" than otherwise. A time of intensified class struggle can be expected.

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Obama – No real change

The hope many have in Obama to implement policies that will benefit the class that matters is misplaced.

Judging by the ubiquitous media-generated euphoria that greeted the Barak Obama victory in the US presidential election, you could be forgiven for thinking that the class struggle had ended in the USA. Across the globe, the world's media intimated that this was the dawn of a new age and hundreds of millions of workers breathed a sigh of relief, convinced President Obama will now undo all the wrongdoing carried out by President Bush and generally

improve the quality of their lives and the safety of the planet.

The first thing to note, however, is that this had been the most expensive American election so far. The pooled cost of the Republican and Democratic campaigns was a cool \$1 billion. The McCain camp raised \$340 million whereas the Obama team secured \$640 million. While Obama's team boasted that most of their money came from small \$100 and \$200 donors, in truth the great bulk of his financial

support came from Wall Street and the US corporate elite and was way in advance of that given to John McCain, suggesting the US capitalism plc feels its profits are best protected via Obama. The US power elite bankrolled the Obama campaign and for no other reason than that they know he will have to repay their loyalty.

An estimated 64 percent of the US electorate turned out to vote – a record by all accounts – 62.3 million votes. The majority of the

“The signs, however, that Obama was more of a wolf in sheep’s clothing were already there, not least in the Senate where he sanctioned every increase in funding for the Iraq war that George Bush requested.”

extra voters were Blacks and Latino, not only drawn to the ballot box by the longing to oust a reactionary Republican regime, or by Obama’s promise of ‘change’ but, moreover, because Obama was non-white. Socialists could only watch on and comment that this election was not a race issue, but a class issue and lament their selective amnesia. One time Secretary of State Colin Powell rose through the ranks covering up the My Lai massacre and famously presented false evidence to the UN in furtherance of the US justification for the invasion of Iraq. Consider too his successor Condoleezza Rice, the zealous maid-servant to Bush’s imperialist strategy.

To be sure, Obama was not breaking any mould, despite his hope-fused rhetoric. The vast majority of voters, indeed workers the world over, were heartily fed up with Bush’s wars, his imperialist conquests, the US disregard for international law and the increasing pariah status this had earned America and sincerely wanted to see the back of it. The signs, however, that Obama was more of a wolf in sheep’s clothing were already there, not least in the Senate where he sanctioned every increase in funding for the Iraq war that George Bush requested.

Furthermore, like Bush, Obama is a supporter of the death penalty. He is pro-pollutant nuclear and coal industries and, whilst the *Guardian* could optimistically run a headline “Obama will move to veto Bush laws” (10 November), has not mentioned eradicating repressive legislation such as the Patriot Act, homeland security, the Military Commissions Act, internet control, and wiretapping and spying on the US populace.

It certainly looks like the Bush administration’s imperial ambitions will continue under Obama. He has already spoken about building up

US military power by 20,000 troops and has declared his intention to cut troop numbers in Iraq and transfer them to a surge in Afghanistan and indeed spread war to nuclear armed Pakistan. All of this will be, as under Bush, carried out to further the interests of a profit-hungry corporate elite and veiled in pompous patriotic oratory about spreading democracy and American values and fighting the “war on terror.” Undoubtedly, Obama will soon be using the hackneyed theme of social unity to wage the class war internally and abroad on behalf of a small power elite.

He also undertaken, to “isolate Hamas”, elected in democratic elections that were verified by an international team of observers and, picking up the baton from Bush, used his first press conference as president-elect to likewise cock a snook at the US National Intelligence Estimate and evidence presented by the IAEA on Iran’s nuclear intentions, and accused Iran of the “development of a nuclear weapon” and vowed “to prevent that from happening.”

If Obama apologists think the President Obama will put a halt to the blood letting they are going to be sorely disappointed. Make no mistake; whilst the left are fond of castigating Republicans as the masters of war, the truth is that historically the Democrats have started far more wars than the GOP. More recently, under the last Democrat to hold office, President Clinton, one million Iraqis are said to have died under US enforced sanctions, 500, 000 of them children. Sorties over Iraq were flown every single day Clinton was in power. Yugoslavia was mercilessly bombed and a much needed pharmaceutical plant in Sudan was bombed on the pretext that it was manufacturing Chemical weapons, and villages in Afghanistan were

flattened because Bin-Laden was presumed to be living there. And who could forget the US invasion of Somalia, with troops storming the beaches live on prime time TV!

Who will make up the Obama administration is at the time of writing speculation, though we do know his Chief of Staff is Israeli army veteran Rahm Emanuel, popularly viewed as Likudist hawk and that his National Security Adviser will be architect of the Mujahedeen Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Not only is Obama incapable of ushering in significant change, bar a few miserly reforms, but neither is there anyone he can bring to his administration capable of bringing the change that was so promised in his election campaign for no other reason that changers do not get confirmed by the Senate. There exist quite influential interest groups – the AIPAC, the military security complex, Wall Street etc to hinder the advancement of such undesirables

The hope many have in Obama to implement policies that will benefit the class that matters is misplaced. His political rawness means he will be manipulated by more experienced advisers, little different from the neo-cons, maybe even key figures from the Bush administration, and pressured by a corporate elite who funded his victory to execute policies that fit in with their own agenda.

The outcome of US elections carries one truth: namely that whichever candidate becomes president, he has but one remit once in office – to further the interests of the US corporate elite. It’s just not a feasible option for any newly elected president to entertain any idea other than guaranteeing a safe playing field for the domestic profit machine and doing what’s needed to try to ensure the US maintains its global hegemonic status.

JOHN BISSETT

An urban myth is circulating on the internet that banks have been creating money out of thin air.

Banks, money and thin air

Those who have seen the cult film *Zeitgeist* and its sequel *Zeitgeist Addendum*, popular amongst conspiracy theorists and others suspicious of governments and banks, will have heard recounted the argument that banks can somehow create money out of thin air by the stroke of a pen or, these days, by the touch of a computer keyboard.

In *Zeitgeist Addendum* this argument is based on what is stated in an educational booklet published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. Entitled *Modern Money Mechanics* it first came out in 1975 and has gone through several editions.

Zeitgeist Addendum begins by describing how it thinks the Federal Reserve Bank (the “Fed”) creates money. If, it says, the government wants more money then, through the Treasury, it creates Treasury bonds which it exchanges with the Fed for currency notes of the same face value; as the government has to

pay interest on the bonds this adds to the National Debt and so is “debt money”. Both the Treasury bonds and the currency notes have been created out of thin air.

This is one way of putting it but it is misleading. It is rather the other way round in that the initiative to create more currency comes from the Federal Reserve Bank. Once it has decided that more notes are needed it asks the Treasury to print them (for which the Treasury charges). The normal way these get into circulation is by the commercial banks converting into currency some of the reserves they are obliged to lodge with the Fed. *Modern Money Mechanics* explains:

“Currency held in bank vaults may be counted as legal reserves as well as deposits (reserve balances) in the Federal Reserve Banks. Both are equally acceptable in satisfaction of reserve requirements. A bank can always obtain reserve balances by sending currency to its Reserve Bank

and can obtain currency by drawing on its reserve balance” (p. 4).

In any event, both the Treasury and the Federal Reserve are part of government so we are talking about internal state accounting arrangements. It is, however, true that the new currency has been created out of nothing. Since it is not backed by gold and convertible on demand into a pre-fixed amount of gold, it is what in the US is called “fiat money”, that is, money created by a mere act of State.

Modern Money Mechanics does not in fact have much to say about currency creation but concentrates on what it calls “money creation”. It draws a distinction between “currency” and “money”. This is explained clearly enough on the first page of the booklet where money is defined as currency plus bank accounts with a cheque or debit card; which is M1 in the jargon (“In the remainder of this booklet, ‘money’ means M1”).



Congressman Ron Paul, from Texas, a critic of “fractional reserve banking” and advocate of a return to a gold-backed currency, has an even wider definition of “money”:

“M3 is the best description of how quickly the Fed is creating new money and credit. Common sense tells us that a government central bank creating new money out of thin air depreciates the value of each dollar in circulation.” (27 April 2006, see <http://www.lewrockwell.com/paul/paul319.html>).

M3 includes other types of bank deposits and liabilities not included in M1. In claiming that all new money created by the Fed depreciates the dollar he is overstating his case. All the US currency (but, as we shall see, not bank deposits) is created “out of thin air” but an increase won’t lead to a depreciation of the dollar as long as it corresponds to an increase in the amount required by the economy for its various transactions (paying for goods and services, settling debts, paying taxes, etc). It is only currency issued in excess of this that will cause a decline in its value and so a rise in the general price level.

Everybody accepts that cash (currency, notes and coin) is money. Some might be prepared to include cash deposited in banks as well. But *Modern Money Mechanics* definition of bank deposits is wider than this. It doesn’t mean just deposits by people of the money they already possess but any account for which the holder has a cheque or debit card, i.e. including credit lines granted to those who banks have lent money to (so enabling *Zeitgeist* to go on talking about “debt money”):

“Checkable liabilities of banks are money. These liabilities are customers’ accounts. They increase when customers deposit currency and checks and when the proceeds of loans made by banks are credited to borrowers’ accounts” (p. 3, emphasis added).

So, when it talks about “money creation” it is not talking about currency creation but mainly about “bank deposit” (in the above sense) creation.

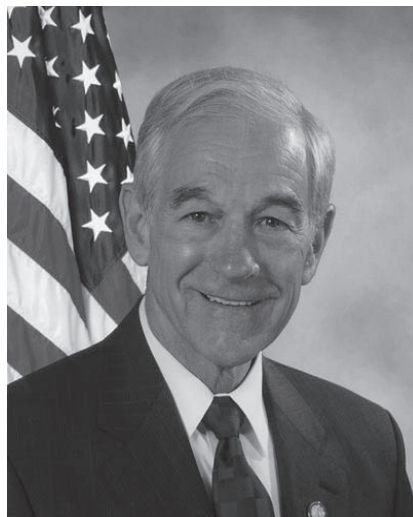
The Federal Reserve booklet goes on to explain what “fractional reserve banking” involves and how it can lead to the creation of more “money” in the sense of more bank deposits. Banks, it explains, have learned that when cash has been deposited with them they only need to keep a part (a “fraction”) of it as cash as a “reserve” to deal with likely cash withdrawals; the rest they can lend

out. What this fraction is depends on the circumstances, but historically it has been around 10 percent.

On the booklet’s definition, in making a loan a bank is “creating money” as their loans will take the form of creating a new bank deposit as a credit line which the borrower can draw on as if they had made a deposit of their own money (except they will be paying interest on it). The



Above: the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. Below: Ron Paul, a critic of “fractional reserve banking”



booklet then asks “What Limits the Amount of Money Banks Can Create” and answers that this depends on the cash reserves it has decided to hold or is required by law to keep.

It is here that *Modern Money Mechanics*, by suddenly shifting from what an individual bank can do to what all banks together (“the banking system”) can, opens the way to the misinterpretation of people like Ron Paul and the makers of the *Zeitgeist* films that banks too can create “money” out of thin air. The booklet

explains that US banks are required by law to keep a “fraction” of deposits as “reserves” in its vaults and/or a balance with the Fed, and says:

“For example, if reserves of 20 percent were required, deposits could expand only until they were five times as large as reserves. Reserves of \$10 million could support deposits of \$50 million” (p. 4).

This is a very misleading way of putting as it could suggest that if banks receive total new deposits of \$10 million they can immediately proceed to make loans of four times this. This is not so, and not really what the booklet meant to suggest. What it means is that the banks can immediately lend out only four-fifths of \$10 million, or \$8 million, and that this circulates throughout the banking system leading in theory to new loans totalling in the end \$40 million, bringing total “bank deposits” up to \$50 million.

Confusingly, the numerical examples the booklet goes on to give to illustrate this are based not on a 20 percent reserve fraction but on a 10 percent one (which is more or less what the law in the US requires for the kind of bank deposits in question). So, to take its example, if \$10,000 is deposited in the banking system, initially say in one bank, that bank can make loans (create credit line bank deposits) of \$9000. When it is spent this \$9000 will be re-deposited in other banks which can then lend out 90 percent of this, or \$8100; which in turn will be re-deposited in banks, allowing a further \$7290 to be lent out, and so on, until in the end and over the period, a total of \$90,000 new loans will have been made.

This shows how the Fed can practise “fractional reserve banking” to control the amount of “money” (currency plus bank deposits) in the economy. This is done via “open market operations” as explained in a section headed “Bank Deposits – How They Expand or Contract”:

“Let us assume that expansion in the money stock is desired by the Federal Reserve to achieve its policy objectives . . . [T]he Federal Reserve System, through its trading desk at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, buys \$10,000 of Treasury bills from a dealer in US government securities. In today’s world of computerized financial transactions, the Federal Reserve Bank pays for the securities with an ‘electronic’ check drawn on itself . . . The Federal Reserve System has added \$10,000 of securities to its assets, which it has paid for, in effect, by *creating* a

liability on itself in the form of bank reserve balances" (p. 6).

The bank from which the Treasury bills were purchased now has reserves above the 10 percent limit and so can turn the \$10,000 into loans, which starts the process described above rolling, leading to an extra \$90,000 bank lending.

In theory the Fed could contract bank lending in the same way, but this has never happened. So M1 has gone up and up each year. But what about the currency in all this? It too has gone up but passively and almost automatically. With increased banking activity more currency notes are required, which banks get by converting their reserves into this and which, if it hasn't enough notes, the Fed just asks the Treasury to print more. But this has consequences – the depreciation of the dollar and the rise in the general price level Congressman Paul doesn't like.

But has the banking system really created more "money"? Only if you regard "bank deposits" as money. If you don't, all that has been shown is that currency has circulated in that the whole process depends

on the initial deposit or injection of cash being recycled as further deposits by depositors (as opposed to by banks creating a credit line). So, neither an individual bank nor the whole banking system can lend more than has been deposited with it. By the end of the process, in the example given, the first loan (out of the first deposit of \$10,000) of \$9000 has been used and used again for genuine deposits totalling \$90,000. But all this assumes an expanding economy, since where is the money to repay the loans and the interest on them to come from without being assured of which the banks would not lend the money in the first place?

So the banking system does not create money to lend out of thin air but can only lend money deposited with it and then only when economic conditions permit it.

Today, bank deposits are not the only source of what the banks lend. They also borrow on the money market (as has been highlighted by the present banking crisis). This means that their reserves are an even smaller percentage of their total loans, only about 3 percent in fact. This figure is mentioned in *Zeitgeist*

Addendum as if this was now the "fractional reserve" and that therefore banks, or the banking system, can "create" loans of up to 33 times an initial deposit. Another silly mistake.

If currency cranks such as the makers of the *Zeitgeist* films have got the wrong end of the stick about "fractional reserve banking" and imagine that it means banks, whether singly or all together, can create money or credit out of thin air this is partly the fault of the way that booklets like the one produced by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago try to explain it. Of course the Fed does not believe the "thin air" claim, but to refute the currency cranks it would have not only to re-iterate that no single bank receiving an additional deposit of \$10,000 can forthwith loan out \$90,000, but also spell out that the expansion of credit line bank deposits still depends on people making real deposits of their own, unborrowed money (whether in cash or by cheque or by bank transfer). Which would restore a sense of reality and explode the myth that banks can create loans out of thin air.

ADAM BUICK



Cooking the Books 2

Fictitious capital

The present crisis has led journalists to look for quotes from Marx. Here's another example, this time from John Plender of the *Financial Times* (18 October):

"Karl Marx was wrong about many things, but in 1893 he provided as good an account of today's financial implosion as any living commentator. "To the

possessor of money capital, the process of production appears merely as an unavoidable intermediate link, as a necessary evil for the sake of money-making. All nations with a capitalist mode of production are therefore seized periodically by a feverish attempt to make money without the intervention of the process of production."

(http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b63025ca-9cad-11dd-a42e-000077b07658.html?nclck_check=1)

Plender was wrong about many things. First, Marx died in 1883 so he could not have written anything in 1893. This was the date that Engels published the second German edition of Volume II of *Capital*. Second, it is not even an accurate quote. The first six words are not part of the quote, but something the person Plender was quoting from added in square brackets to introduce the context. Third, the last sentence about "all nations" was added by Engels, as he explained in a footnote (in section 4 of chapter 1).

This said, the passage brings out well that the aim of production under capitalism is not really to make things – that is only incidental – but to make money, more money than those with or controlling money-capital set out with. The source of the added money is the unpaid labour of those who actually produce wealth, the class of wage and salary workers, but this is obscured in financial dealings.

Marx dealt with the illusion that money can give rise to more

money without production in Volume III of *Capital*. Here (chapter 29) he introduced the concept of "fictitious capital". There is nothing dodgy about such capital. It's something insurance companies have been doing for years. As Marx explained:

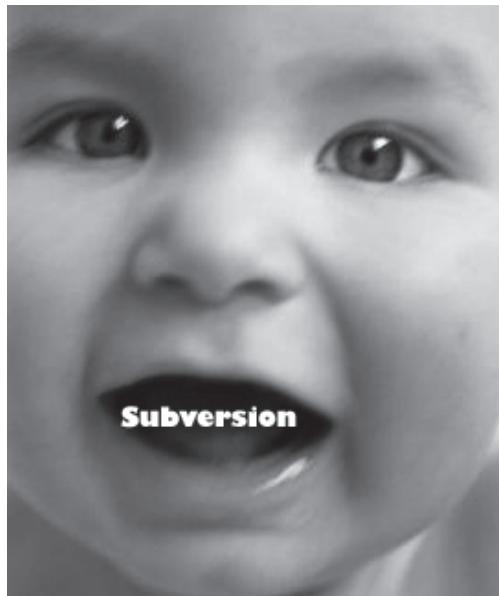
"The formation of a fictitious capital is called capitalization. Every periodic income is capitalized by calculating it on the basis of the average rate of interest, as an income which would be realized by a capital loaned at this rate of interest. For example, if the annual income is £100 and the rate of interest 5%, then the £100 would represent the annual interest on £2,000, and the £2,000 is regarded as the capital-value of the legal title of ownership on the £100 annually. For the person who buys this title of ownership, the annual income of £100 represents indeed the interest on his capital invested at 5%. All connection with the actual expansion process of capital is thus completely lost, and the conception of capital as something with automatic self-expansion properties is thereby strengthened."

Examples of this are government bonds, the price of land, and stocks and shares. Marx called these "fictitious" capital because the capital sum did not really exist, only the estimated future income stream did and that depended in the end on future production. In the case of shares, the real capital is in the fixed assets (factories, equipment, machines) and working capital (to buy materials, pay for energy, the wages fund) of the capitalist firm; this capital does not exist a second time in the prices of the shares.

One thing that banks had been doing in recent years was to increase the amount of such fictitious capital by turning mortgage repayments into bonds, "securitising" them in the jargon. If, however, the future income stream is threatened or fails to materialise – as has happened – the fictitious capital so created is depreciated or ceases to exist. But this does not mean that the real capital to which it corresponds has ceased to exist, only that its paper duplicate has gone to money heaven. A reminder that "the conception of capital as something with automatic self-expansion properties" is an illusion.

Education, politics and language

Today's education system is presented as preparation for a 'career' ignoring the political conditioning it also involves.



the education system is seen as preparation for a 'career' rather than political conditioning is evidence of the subversion of the very language used to describe the world. In an effort to present the current social structure the language used presents it as the only possible world and any alternative as either naïve or dangerous fantasy. Why else would it be considered reasonable to debate the existence of a supernatural entity that created the universe (God) but ridiculous to explore the possibility of a stateless and moneyless rational society?

Speaking of money – a great way to start an analysis of the subversion of language

Our species is unique in terms of the length of our childhood. Most believe this to be so because of the advantages of learning which can be passed on culturally. In the natural environment as opposed to the cultural human one, we would not progress very far if we had to learn through personal experience how to create the technological world in which we live.

Vital in this process is an efficient way in which to communicate the lessons of the past – language. As a child grows it exhibits a skill for language that still amazes those who study and analyse the process. Capitalism depends on an authoritarian social structure that seeks to justify and protect the minority who currently have social power. It is not surprising to socialists, then, that these values are also communicated within the process of the 'education' of the young. Together with the more obvious forms of coercion: continual testing to destroy communal feelings by presenting others as competition; enforcement of uniformity in appearance to suppress individuality; living by the clock to impose the illusion of the normality of life as a wage slave; the presentation of 'careers' such as in the military or banking as being acceptable rather than lives celebrating murder or the exploitation of their fellow man – there is also a far more powerful and subversive use of language that this article will seek to illustrate.

Before continuing this analysis we must mention the other type of education that exists within capitalist societies – what, in this country are called public schools. They possess, unsurprisingly, a very different ethos than that described above. For the children of the elite who are not taught at home these institutions exist to prepare their pupils for university where they learn the techniques needed for the City, Westminster, Inns of Court or any of the other institutions dedicated to the suppression and exploitation of the majority class. That this is self-evident to socialists but is seen as an expression of envy and class 'hatred' by the Establishment and even by many members of the working class itself is testament to the power of education and its social values (on both sides).

To the powerful, of course, a socialist education is political manipulation based on propaganda. That to many

in this society. How many times have we heard that money can give us 'independence' and 'choice'? For instance it is said that it gives us the ability to travel. Apparently we don't need the labour and talent that produces cars, boats, trains and planes. What need do we have of shoes, food, clothes and maps to get to our destination? The idea that money can create these things is one of the great illusions implicit within our language.

All the coloured paper and shiny coins in the world will not get you across water unless someone builds you a boat – and not just someone but hundreds and even thousands are involved in producing the possibility of travel. Money represents an involuntary contract that involves an interdependence of, sometimes, global labour – the complete opposite of 'independence'. And how many times have you heard it said that King Henry built this castle and Lord Muck built that stately home? No designers, masons, architects or carpenters were apparently involved. For many it is money that creates our world and not the interdependent labour of us all. What is this if not a political subversion of language?

Perhaps the ultimate triumph of this kind of linguistic perversion is the contemporary view of what constitutes 'politics' itself. We are told that we live in a 'democracy' in which we are free to choose what kind of society we live in. But the most important of all political decisions – what the community produces – is never subjected to any kind of democratic process. Instead the city brokers merely decide which commodities will deliver the greatest or most reliable profits. In other words these decisions are made by a tiny elite minority in the interests of an even smaller minority. In capitalist society the only 'choice' voters have is who will decide how taxes are

distributed to create and maintain the state infrastructure – armies, police, road, rail, law, health and social security system and, of course, the education system.

Even this choice is only 'given' to the people once every five years between two political parties with no important differences in ideology. And this is political democracy? Apart from its obvious farcical and unjust nature it makes politics so boring. It's not just cynicism that turns people off from this 'media politics' it is that it's been sucked dry of meaning and now only represents platitudes and repetitious

"The ruling class seek to own the language as they own everything else..."



clichés. But this is the way our rulers like it. Their media continues to produce meaningless garbage about political celebrities (leaders) and evil foreigners or unions, knowing that while their readers are obsessed with such trivia nothing will ever change. This is the primary aim of our education system – the inculcation of language without political meaning.

For over one hundred years the task of the socialist party has been to counter the propaganda of the status quo. Not just in ideological terms but in trying to restore meaning to political language. Even our opponents have to admit that the meaning they give to words like socialism, democracy, human nature, economics, history and politics itself is very different from ours.

Although socialists grow weary of redefining the very language of politics for every individual

new to our perspective it is quite possible that when we find we do not have to do so, then change is close. For although the ruling class seek to own the language as they own everything else, the needs of a highly technical means of production necessitate a higher and more flexible education system. Their wealth may give them power but it cannot give them intelligence or talent – for that they need us.

It may be that the days of a narrow education to fit the needs of a narrow division of labour are past. More of us are not able to tolerate the public school, university ‘experts’ pontificating on politics any more. They must take responsibility for the dire state of the world. The majority are taking possession of knowledge and do not need politicians, priests, doctors, scientists, prime ministers or any other type of ‘leader’ to make political decisions on our behalf.

WEZ

Make a Decision

“Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past”

This was the slogan of the dreaded Thought Police in George Orwell’s book *1984*.

It is today’s rulers’ slogan too, for the ruling class want to perpetuate their dominance. This is why their ideologues and media have redefined “socialism”; to maintain a class-divided society; this is why there are many career politicians claiming “socialism” to gain power. It is a pity that many follow them who have a genuine sympathy with suffering and seek to remedy the disease of capitalism. But, as Oscar Wilde said, “the remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease” (*Soul of Man under Socialism*).

Technology, science and human goodwill can solve the problems confronting humanity but only after removing the restrictions of the absurd market system.

The minority capitalist class promote the market system as it maintains private property, by which they gain ownership of wealth produced by the working class who actually run industry from top to bottom. The ownership of this monopoly must be taken from the capitalist class. How? We suggest that the socialist majority of society impose the democratically-expressed will for common ownership on the minority capitalist

class. Then, with common ownership established, the whole edifice of the market, private property, wage labour, money, rent, capital, interest, for they are all interdependent, is abolished. It is replaced by a rational, classless, society with free access for all to the common wealth of society; and real human progress begins.

Conscious democratic control and application of shared available knowledge will allow the opportunity of real true freedom. The evidence that everyone has equal power and an equal vote in every decision taken will be obvious within this future, stateless society by the removal of hunger – used as a subtle form of control under capitalism. Within this society of freely associating equal individuals, every woman, man and child will take what goods they need from a communal store. This free access, this freedom, is what will maintain real democracy and it will be possible because money will be non-existent and unnecessary. Our common sense will tell us not to waste what could be shared with others; this is what the early socialists expected.

As socialists we want to participate in a progression of the global community to free humankind’s real human potential. “Give us our world,” you will say. It will not be given; you must make it. Socialists are equal but are each different. We don’t accept leaders, Thought Police or career politicians, which is why we invite you to ignore leaders and Thought Police too. Begin to free yourself, be confident, be disobedient; think for yourself, ask questions and inquire after the case we suggest. We have nothing to lose but our chains. We have a world to win.

CB

Five more benefits of not having money

We continue describing how things could be like in a socialist society, where there would be no need for money.

1. Environment

Bear in mind the aim here is an excursion into the benefits of money totally disappearing from our lives; for all to have access to the necessities of life and in return to contribute their effort for the common good. Havoc has been wreaked on the environment by corporations and others with the full consent of successive governments around the world – for the acquisition of necessary resources but using unnecessarily harmful methods. Peak oil and climate change are terms on everyone's lips and the general consensus from Joe Public is that *something* needs to be done – and fast.

If we remove the agents for profit (corporations and governments of the capitalist system) and engage in honest democracy of the people,

by the people and for the people decisions can be made to halt damaging practices and implement methods of farming, fishing, mining, extraction, energy production, manufacturing etc. that do no harm to either man or environment. Safe working practices will be the norm. Resources can be protected and used carefully when incentive for their rape and pillage is gone. Energy usage can be reduced drastically in 1001 ways using alternative energies, building using integral insulation and energy conservation techniques, vastly reducing transport as work and societal practices change, stopping air freight of "luxury" and unnecessary goods, producing and manufacturing locally wherever feasible, etc.

Local communities could have the final say on resources in their area with the possibility that sometimes the resource will be deemed off-limits and so remain untouched, and if no one is prepared to work mining or tunnelling to extract a particular resource then an alternative will need to be found. With a system of no money there can be no forced labour or unacceptable working practices. Resources will be valued for what they are, not what price they can be sold for, and protection of the environment can be put firmly on the agenda as demanded by the world's majority.

2. War and Conflict

Envisaging this newly emerging moneyless world, it is apparent that cooperation rather than competition will be the

driving force to its development and the glue that will bind communities. Having removed the profit incentive and made access to resources free, production will be for use only. There are no losers in this scenario, all are to benefit from the new world order. It's just that a tiny minority might have difficulty in coming round to see it that way. As a consequence of this totally different emphasis – freedom of access and no monetary element – it isn't difficult to accept that military forces will become redundant.

Wars have always been about control of territory for resources and are usually promoted in the name of democracy, expansion abroad or protection of the domestic population from threat of real or manufactured enemies but which always utilise armies recruited from the mass of the population and sacrifice workers in the service of the capitalist cause. Internal conflicts involving government backed forces against "insurgents"/"freedom fighters", breakaway independence groups/terrorists – when looked at rationally are (a) about lack of rights for certain sections of the community, groups deprived of their own self-determination; tensions deliberately fostered between sections of society so the elites can keep control (divide and rule) and (b) only temporarily dealt with (if at all) through force. If the causes aren't dealt with the effects are sure to reappear. Dealing with the causes, injustices, lack of access, etc. needs the pawns in the game to recognise that that is what they are and to join forces against those controlling them, putting the



power of decision making into the hands of the majority and ending the reasons for future conflict.

No need for ownership or use of war material will render a massive service to the environment, saving resources on a huge scale and stopping pollution of the planet from the harmful waste created in both their production and deployment besides avoiding millions of deaths. Saving lives could become the new unarmed forces *raison d'être*. Bodies of fit, well-trained, well-resourced, motivated men and women available to deal with the effects of natural disasters and unexpected calamities would be one of a number of ways to deploy the willing volunteers, a civil action force for true humanitarian intervention.

3. Media and Advertising

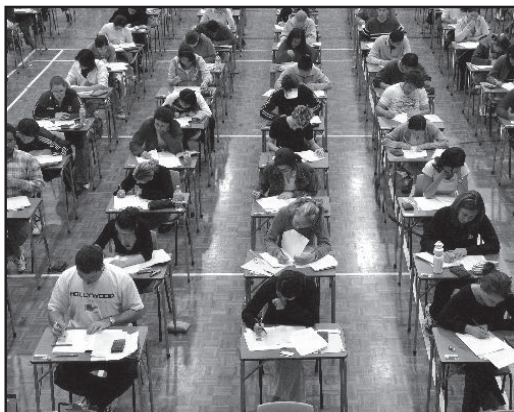
Media without money? In today's system we buy newspapers and magazines, a licence to watch television plus payments to a provider for umpteen other channels and subscribe to internet providers for access to the world wide web. If something arrives at your house for free, it has been paid for by advertising and advertising gets its money from services provided to businesses, and businesses get their money from customers buying the products and services.

Without the profit motive it would be possible to watch a film or interesting documentary uninterrupted by advertisements that always intrude at a higher level of decibels. Junk mail would be redundant; another positive for the environment. Ugly advertising hoardings crowding town spaces and roadsides would give way to more thoughtful and aesthetically pleasing additions to our visual surroundings. Many talented artists would be freed up to turn their expertise in more socially acceptable and useful directions. Media, in general, could become what the people want, not what they're told they want. Real choice, real variety, true information and not warped by an individual proprietor's view. This could be such an exciting area with much more community involvement from

planning to production. Released from wage slavery and with the intellect free from worry about unemployment, housing, health care etc. etc. the capacity for individual personal development will expand considerably.

4. Education

In its broadest sense education is just that – individual personal development. The most fulfilled individuals are those who can reach the end of their lives knowing they have spent their time exploring to the limits the areas that most interest and motivate them. These individuals are not satisfied by or limited to an eight-hour day, they continue willingly for extended hours because they enjoy and are motivated by what it is they are doing. Conversely, of the various officially recognised systems of education available in the world today none come close to encouraging youngsters to pursue their own individually chosen path in life. Institutional education is about fitting young children to become



compliant teenage students who can then be steered in one of the very limited directions on offer. This is called choice. The best time to learn anything is when the

individual is motivated to do so at whatever age. The best way to learn is usually by doing – a combination of observation and practice. Sitting at a desk in a room with 20, 30, 50 or so others for several hours a day is not conducive to good learning and not conducive to producing free thinking adults, but it is a good preconditioning for adult life in a money-oriented world which requires both a compliant workforce and passive unemployed.

To hear a nine-year old's response when asked what he would like to do when he leaves school, "Well, I'll go and get my Giro" is a shocking indictment of a system which by its very nature excludes many people. Whether in the examination system or later in the work situation, a certain percentage every year must be expected to fail. How humiliating and degrading is that? But that is

how this system works; there is only room for so many to achieve.

When the work situation changes so that all are contributing regularly to the common good by the work they perform and all are freely taking their daily needs from the common store youngsters will experience a totally different example from today's. Education will be embraced as offering ongoing opportunities for all to succeed in their chosen areas in societies which value all members regardless of their so-called IQ.

5. Quality of Life

In a world of money "quality" is equated with cost. A quality item costs more than a shoddy or mass produced one, e.g. Rolls Royce v a standard Ford. "Quality" chocolate costs the consumer more but doesn't give more to the grower. Quality is a term used to convey superiority and status, something better than the rest, better than the others. Unfortunately when coupled with time most families have little of it and the cost can be great. Quality of life is talked about as something desirable, to be aspired to and implies a certain level of income but, in fact, everyone has a quality of life, a comparative quality which could be measured against many different yardsticks. Most people would admit they are looking for ways to improve their own.

In order to achieve the positive changes to be gained by the disappearance of money, power has to be taken away from the elites and placed firmly in the hands of the people. None of the proposals posed above could become reality without the will of the majority – but what is the will of the majority, the popular perception of the "system" today? Active consent for the system is generally lacking and people have allowed themselves to become resigned to it instead of opposing it, believing that there is no alternative. Surely it is within the capacity of this miracle of evolution to reason its way back from the headlong rush to condemn billions of its own to degradation and misery, whilst destroying its own habitat with the philosophy that money can solve all problems? With money gone the generally accepted meaning of "quality of life" can become a reality for all to contemplate and world citizens will be free to aspire to achieving goals worthy of humankind.

JANET SURMAN

A booming industry

even in a recession

A recent issue of the magazine *Time* (14 October) highlighted the immense profits to be made in capitalism even in a trade recession. "Need to start a war? No problem. While stock markets grate and financial institutions (and even whole countries, like Iceland) teeter on bankruptcy, one global industry is still drawing plenty of high-end trades and profits: weapons."

The article reported the case in a Paris courtroom where 42 officials went on trial for taking millions in kickbacks and organising huge arms commissions from the Angolan government during the mid-1990s. This group, which included a former French Interior minister and the son of the late French President Mitterrand, were charged with having supplied almost \$800 million worth of arms to Angola, including 12 helicopters, 6 naval vessels, 150,000 shells and 170,000 mines.

The Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos used this huge stockpile to crush the US-backed Unita rebels during Angola's devastating civil war. It is worth noting that Dos Santos is reckoned to have made millions of dollars from the transaction and that he is still in power with no prospect of a fraud trial for him.

The source of this arms hardware was the huge stockpiles of Soviet weapons left behind when the Soviet Union collapsed. The French businessman Pierre Falcone allegedly plied

Angolan officials with tens of millions of dollars – some of it stuffed in suitcases – and deposited other sums in offshore accounts.

You might imagine that these shady dealings having been brought to light could no longer occur, but you would be dreadfully wrong. "Researchers say arms trading has boomed in the decade since the Angolagate scandal was uncovered. That's partly due to heightened supply. As ex-Soviet republics emerged as economic actors in their own right, several countries developed national arms industries, refitting weapons from their stocks and manufacturing new weapons of their own. These industries have taken off in recent years. Ukraine has about 6 million light weapons from Soviet stockpiles, and has modernised tanks, anti-aircraft missiles and other weaponry, says Hugh Griffiths, an expert on illicit weapons at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute."

"It is very difficult to stop arms trafficking, because there is no control," says Griffiths, who has researched Ukraine's arsenal for the US government. Although NATO funds Ukraine to destroy its stockpiles, "the Ukrainians realize how much money they can make by selling surplus weapons," he says. In an action that broke no laws, the Ukrainians shipped about 40,000 Kalashnikov rifles to Kenya last year during the tense standoff following the country's disputed presidential election."

As the struggle for oil and minerals intensifies inside capitalism we have rebel conflict in Chad, Sudan, Congo and elsewhere. This conflict needs weapons and so the arms trade legitimate or otherwise flourishes. In Africa and all over the world capitalism reigns supreme. The basis of capitalism is production for profit, so in its remorseless drive for profit it leads to conflict, and eventually armed conflict. It is the nature of the beast to maim and kill and all attempts to civilise it by such grandiose titled groups like the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute are doomed to failure. As the expert Hugh Griffiths himself admits – "there are plenty of arms out there - so long as you have the money to pay for it."

RD



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Blue with polar bear and 'If you were a polar bear, you'd be a socialist' plus party website address.

Yellow, with blue and green globe 'The world is a treasury for all' plus party web site address on.

Sizes: Small, Medium, Large, Extra Large.

Mugs:

One style:

'Duet' - Red and white with 'Only sheep need leaders' (pictured) and

website on,

with "Famine?

War? Pollution? Capitalism is the Problem. World Socialism s the Solution" and party tel. number on.



Pens:

Blue and white, with blue ink 'Only sheep need leaders' and a sheep plus party website

Red and white, with blue ink 'Workers of the world unite' plus party website
Black with black ink. 'Only sheep need leaders!' and a sheep plus party website

Baseball caps:

navy blue, with embroidered "World Socialist Movement" on.

Balloons:

different colours, with "World Socialist Movement" on.

Prices:

Tee shirts £7.00 each (**state size when ordering**). Mugs £5.00 each. Pens £0.50 each. Baseball caps £5.00 each. Balloons 15p each.

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£2.50 for the first £10 and then £1.50 for subsequent £10 worths or part thereof. Please send cheque or postal order (no cash) made payable to SPGB SW Regional Branch, c/o Veronica Clanchy, FAO: South West Regional Branch, 42 Winifred Road, Poole, Dorset. BH15 3PU. Any queries, please phone 01202 569826. Please include own phone number or other contact details.

Book Reviews

A Basic Mistake

Basic Kropotkin – Kropotkin and the History of Anarchism. Brian Morris. Anarchist Communist Editions, 2008. 32 pages. £2



Russian émigré prince Kropotkin, pioneering advocate of "anarchist-communism", is probably best known for his work *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. This

short pamphlet takes us on a fleeting tour through the many strands of Anarchism as related to his theories.

Firstly we are presented with a sketch of the "libertarian impulse" throughout human history; Lao Tzu, classical Greek philosopher Zeno of Citium, the Diggers and even an Islamic sect, the Najadatam all possessed an "anarchist sensibility" and were forerunners of Anarchism proper, it is claimed. For Kropotkin it is William Godwin who first stated the basic principles of Anarchism in his 1793 "Enquiry Concerning Political Justice" though he did not use the term – it was first used by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

In the next chapter we meet Bakunin whom, rather confusingly, we are told "was at heart a communist" even though he defended a form of private property where the products of labour are traded between individual – and therefore competing – labour associations or "free communes".

Finally we come to Kropotkin's dispute with the mutualists, most notably Proudhon, Warren and Tucker. Kropotkin applauded their "vigorous defence of the rights of the individual" but in defending private property they opened up the way "for reconstituting under the heading of 'defence' all the functions of the state."

The main flaw of the pamphlet is in Morris's failure to see the distinction between Marx's thought and the Leninist concept of the vanguard party. Marx is falsely lumped together with the Blanquists of which Engels commented "Blanqui's assumption, that any revolution may be made by the outbreak of a small revolutionary minority, follows of itself the necessity of a dictatorship after

the success of the venture. This is, of course, a dictatorship, not of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small minority that has made the revolution... These conceptions of the march of revolutionary events have long become obsolete." (*The Program of the Blanquist Fugitives from the Paris Commune*).

For Marx and Engels the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' meant a politically organised and conscious working class democratically controlling the transformation of the state; not the totalitarian rule of the vanguard party, as Lenin, the Anarchists and others have claimed. However, circumstances have changed since Marx and Engels put forward this concept, it is not a term the Socialist Party would use today.

By still claiming that the theories of Marx are akin to those of Lenin and other vanguardists the Anarchists are doing a disservice to the truth.

DP

Post-modern guru

Goodbye Mr Socialism. Radical Politics in the 21st Century. Antonio Negri with Raf Scelsi. Serpents Tail Press, London, 2008



The Italian intellectual, Toni Negri, who was once sentenced to jail in Italy for giving a theoretical defence of urban terrorism, is highly regarded in some circles.

The blurb on the back of this book describes him as "one of the world's leading experts on Marxism" and as "a guru of the post-modern Left". He may well be the latter but is certainly not the former.

The opening chapter is a surprisingly indulgent justification of some of the things that happened in Stalin's Russia, even if this is part of the "Mr Socialism" to which he is saying good bye in this transcript of a question and answer session with another Italian intellectual. The other part is the whole idea of the factory proletariat, organised in trade unions and left wing political parties, as the agent of social change:

"the epoch of wages is finished and that the struggle has moved from the level of a fight between capital and labour regarding the wage, to a fight between the multitude and the State around the income of citizenship."

The "income of citizenship" is a clumsy translation of what is more usually called a "Basic Income" or, by the Green Party, a "Citizen's Income", defined in a lexicon at the end of the book as:

"a monetary payment distributed at regular intervals to all those who enjoy citizenship and residency for a certain period of time, which allows a minimum dignity of life . . . It is paid to those of working age, for the period that goes from the end of obligatory schooling to pension age or death."

Negri supports this as he sees the demand for it as "a refusal of work and of the wage relationship". If introduced other than as some tinkering with the tax and benefits system it would indeed undermine the economic compulsion to go out and work for an employer; which of course (apart from its cost) is why it is never going to happen under capitalism. In any event, as a goal, it is a poor substitute for "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs".

Negri does, however, have a point when he criticises those who look only to the factory proletariat as the agent of social change. This is only a section of the working class properly so-called and, in the developed capitalist parts of the world, is now less than 50 percent of the workforce. But, in placing his hopes in those with knowledge skills involved in non-material work (the "cognitariat" as he calls them) he would seem to be making the same mistake of wanting to rely on a section only of the working class.

Surely the point is that social change has to be up to the class of wage and salary workers as a whole, not just one section. Or perhaps this is what Negri means by the "multitude", which, if it is, comes across in English as a rather derogatory term to describe all those forced by economic necessity to sell their mental and physical energies for a wage or salary.

ALB



Money

Marx's Theory of the Genesis of Money. Samezō Kuruma, translated with an introduction by E. Michael Schauerte, Outskirts Press, 2008



Money can function as a means of exchange, a measure of value, a general equivalent, a standard of price, a store of value.

Samezō Kuruma takes a close look at some of the key theoretical issues related to Marx's concept of money. Kuruma (1893-1982) was a Japanese Marxist economist and the text here is translated by a member of our American companion party. He also provides an introduction which seeks to outline the answers to how, why and through what is a commodity money. Kuruma's text, however, is purely analytical in its approach and is devoid of historical context, a common failing amongst many Japanese writers on Marxian economics.

LEW

New Pamphlet *An Inconvenient Question: Socialism and the Environment*



see order form on page 9 for details

Meetings

London

Public Meeting followed by Social.

Saturday **10 January**, 6pm

DID YOU ENJOY YOUR CHRISTMAS?

Speaker: Jim Lawrie.

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4

(nearest tube: Clapham North)

Saturday **31 January**, 6pm

Film: ZEITGEIST ADDENDUM

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4

West London

Tuesday **20 January**, 8pm

WHAT HAPPENING IN THAILAND?

Socialists who were there answer questions.

Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4.

(nearest tube: Chiswick Park)

Glasgow

Wednesday **21 January**, 8.30pm

BANKS, BOOM AND BURST.

Speaker: Vic Vanni.

Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road.

Saturday **24 January**, 3pm to 5pm.

PUBLIC DEBATE: DID TROTSKY POINT THE WAY TO SOCIALISM?

Yes: Hillel Ticktin, editor of Critique.

No: Adam Buick, Socialist Party.

Hillhead Public Library, Byres Road.

East Anglia

Saturday **24 January**, 12 noon to 4pm

12pm informal chat

1pm meal

2pm to 4pm Discussion

The Conservertory, back room of Rosary Tavern, Rosary Road, Norwich.

Manchester

Monday **26 January**, 8.30pm

'Is a World of Abundance Possible?'

Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre



Memorable happenings in 1958



The falling off of production and decline of sales have hit privately owned textiles just as hard as the State-owned railways and mines, and the textile industry presents us with a harsh example of another illusion that ran parallel with the nationalisation campaign and was held by the same people. This was the illusion, prominent after World War II, that things were not going to be as they had been in the depressed 'thirties. No more would there be unemployment and the dole queue; for those "in the know" had learned how to plan for full employment.

(...)

Unemployment for all industries is now on the way to 600,000, a figure that does not take account of the many who have lost their jobs but do not register as unemployed,

and though the government professes to be sure that things will get better "in the Spring" they have yet to explain the whys and wherefores of what has already happened. What has happened to their supposed control of the employment situation and their readiness to step in at short notice to head off depression?

The Labour Party and the Tory Party, the latter with its belief in managing "full employment" and the former believing as well in nationalisation, can look back at 1958 as a year in which their theories were demonstrated to be unsound and useless to the workers. The S.P.G.B. alone can justifiably claim that it predicted both failures.

(from editorial, *Socialist Standard*, January 1959)

2007 SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX

An index of articles to 2007 can be obtained by sending two first-class stamps to **Socialist Standard, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN**

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case

Capitalism? Kids' Stuff

'Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff' is a new DVD from The Socialist Party which asks us to take a fresh look at the world we live in and to question some of the most basic assumptions about life in capitalism.

"All I can say is: Oh my god. I just can't believe how good this is!"
BILL HUSTON, BINGHAMPTON INDYMEDIA, NEW YORK

"I've been teaching for 30 years, and I find this to be one of the best short films I have ever used."
DOUG BROWN, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, NORTH ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

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Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Post Offices – open or shut?

"By all of capitalism's standards of logic the Post Office must be under threat of disappearing"

Postman Pat, delighting children by zooming around Greendale with his observant cat Jess, became a TV success by cashing in on the romance which lingered around the workers who, in all weathers and at all places, delivered the mail. How would Pat survive now, with Greendales's post brought by a tee-shirted trolley-pusher jiggling along to loud calypso music from his radio, who is liable to stuff as much junk advertising material through the letter box as proper mail? It was not always like this; well within living memory postmen (they were always male) wore thick, dark uniforms topped by a hard helmet resembling the *pickelhauber* of the German Army at the start of the 1914/18 war (the peaked caps, just as obligatory, came later). No trolleys then; postmen had to carry the mail in a large, rough sack slung across their shoulder held by coarse string. And they came several times a day; before the age of the telephone it was common for people to tell their family or friends that they would visit them on the following day by writing them a *post card* - relying on the post to get the message there on time. No wonder the posties had so exhaustive a knowledge of their round - who lived where and with whom, how well, or how sick, they were, who had a birthday when. It was this sense of human contact that brought many postmen to be addicted to the job. Like Postman Pat.

Closure

Along with your friendly neighbourhood postman, as part of the same deal, is - or in some cases was - the local post office - also friendly, in fact at times so much so that it resembled a kind of minor, casual branch of the Samaritans. Because it was here that local people came, not just to buy their stamps and postal orders or draw their pension but to unload their anxieties or celebrate their successes. They were more small shops than post offices, selling newspapers, food and the like. It is a general assumption that they existed only in rural areas, in small sleepy villages but in fact they survive, supplying their locality, in many a town and city. One example was given by Keith Hill, the MP for Streatham, in a House of Commons adjournment debate on 13 March 2008. He described the Abbeville Road post office in Clapham, a part of London where roses do not grow sweetly around the doors of quaint cottages and no ploughman homeward plods his weary way. This post office was under threat of closure, (it has now closed); in its defence Hill praised the services on offer there, making it "a focal point in the community" and "a lifeline of human contact for its many elderly customers"; a petition with over 2000 signatures testifies to this.

Loss

In that same debate Pat McFadden, the Minister for Employment Returns, after the customary emollients about what a brilliantly eloquent speaker and industrious MP Hill is, gently reminded him of the real facts of capitalism's life, the sense of which is that it is all very

well talking about how valued a service may be but what counts is whether it makes a profit or a loss. And by those standards the Post Office network does not show up well; according to McFadden last year it lost £174m, with the cost of some operations high enough to make any accountant with an eye to a balance sheet choke. The postal system as we know it, including pre-payment through adhesive stamps (the famous Penny Black), arose from the demands of 19th century industry and commerce. In the same way, many of the Post Office's present problems are due to it falling behind changes in technology, which have led, for example, to eight out of 10 pensions being paid electronically into a bank instead of being drawn over the Post office counter, after a chat with the staff about their family. Car tax can now be paid online, which is quicker and easier than queuing up with people wanting a book of stamps. While people may get some relief, enjoyment even, in being able to drop into their local branch but that is not how commodity society operates. By all of capitalism's standards of logic the Post Office must be under threat of disappearing as an unvarying, ubiquitous feature of social life.

Relieve

Chosen to make this happen was Adam Crozier, a man who, even before he got to work on shredding the Post Office network, might have been described as controversial. For example after closing some 4600 offices, cutting the work force by 45,000, in 2007 he collected a 26 per cent increase in his basic pay; with his bonus and pension his total came to £1.250.000. However perhaps he will not be so busy in future. In November the government, anxious to placate back benchers being lobbied by irate Post Office customers and to persuade the electorate that they have the recession under control, decided that the Post Office would keep the contract to run the Card Account, which had seemed about to be passed to a private company. This surprising move is expected to prevent some 3000 closures. When it came to explaining so abrupt and emphatic a change of policy the government were able to call on Minister of Work and Pensions James Purnell, who has shown himself well capable of shamelessly defending any policy - or change of it. Taking time off from harassing the sick and unemployed he told MPs that the Post Office "...is seen as safe, secure and reliable as a provider of financial services. I believe that now cannot be the time for the government to do anything that would put that network at risk" and on BBC Radio that the Post Office is "...a social service which people look forward to visiting. It is often at the heart of local communities". We should not be surprised at this hi-jacking of the case put by the government's opponents for it is just another example of the blatant smoke-screening of the reality of capitalism's chaotic nature. There is no need to watch this space because we can all guess what will happen next...

IVAN





The Futility Of Reformism

"One result of Ethiopia's dreadful famine in 1984, when at least 1m starved to death, was the invention of celebrity activism on behalf of the world's most miserable. Band Aid, then Live Aid, then even more sophisticated networking and the airing of starving children on television helped persuade rich countries' governments to double aid to Africa as part of a wider set of promises to meet the UN's eight Millennium Development Goals laid out in 2000, the first of which is to 'eradicate extreme poverty and hunger' by 2018. Despite progress in setting up early-warning systems, better procurement methods and the rapid delivery of nutrition in the form of foil packets of plumpy nuts, the Horn of Africa has remained a hunger zone. The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) says the present drought is the worst there since 1984. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which is usually slow to press the panic button, says it may be the tragedy of the decade. At least 17.5m people, the agencies reckon, may face starvation." (*Economist*, 30 October) This is typical of the futility of a policy of reformism, many well-intentioned people spend an enormous amount of energy and time in trying to patch up capitalism only to find that instead of a million starving to death they now have over 17 million threatened with the same fate. The only way to solve this awful problem is to abolish the system that produces it and bring about world socialism.

The Cost Of War (1)

Many workers in the USA believe that with the election of a new president all their troubles are over, but the realities of capitalism will soon shatter that

illusion. The US must compete in the world-wide struggle for markets and raw materials and to do so they need an immense military budget. How immense was recently revealed. "As President-elect Obama plans for his first budget early next year, the Pentagon is asking for a record amount, according to a senior Pentagon official. The official said the Pentagon's baseline request being sent to the White House will be \$524 billion for fiscal 2010, \$9 billion more than last year's \$515 billion baseline request." (*CNN.com*, 19 November)

The Cost Of War (2)

When governments count the cost of war they use dollars and pounds and figure what strategic gains or losses have been made, but workers have a much more brutal and realistic way of accounting. Here it is. "As of Monday, Nov. 17, 2008, at least 4,200 members of the U.S. military have died in the Iraq war since it began in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. The figure



includes eight military civilians killed in action. At least 3,392 military personnel died as a result of hostile action, according to the military's numbers. The AP count is the same as the Defense

Department's tally, last updated Monday at 10 a.m. EDT. The British military has reported 176 deaths; Italy, 33; Ukraine, 18; Poland, 21; Bulgaria, 13; Spain, 11; Denmark, seven; El Salvador, five; Slovakia, four; Latvia and Georgia, three each; Estonia, Netherlands, Thailand and Romania, two each; and Australia, Hungary, Kazakhstan and South Korea, one death each." (*Associated Press*, 17 November)

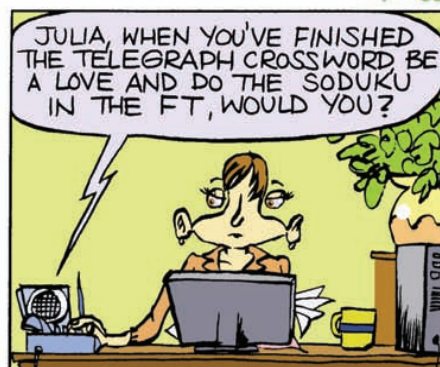
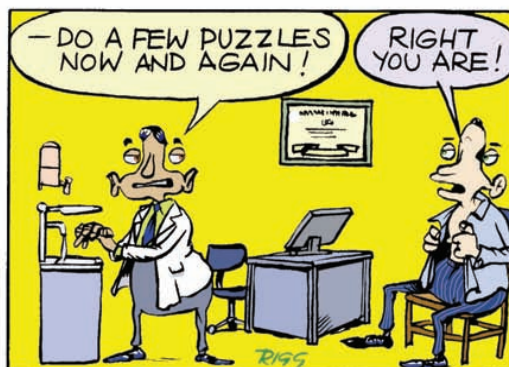
Dole Queue Dictionary

Everyday you can read about the mounting figures of unemployment. This used to be called "getting the sack", "getting the bullet" or in Scotland getting "your jotters", but we live in more sophisticated times so they sugarcoat it with terms like "being surplus to requirements" or some such business-speak. We think that Nokia must take the prize though. "Is your firm experiencing a 'synergy-related headcount restructuring'?" This, probably the most ghastly euphemism yet encountered for mass sacking, has been invented by Nokia. Indeed, so proud of it are they that they repeat it, or different versions of it, nine times in a comparatively short announcement." (*Times*, 22 November) As a worker I have been sacked, screwed and sent down the road but "headcount restructuring" sounds even more painful.

A Dog's Life

Two recent news items illustrate how distorted human values have become inside capitalism. "A wealthy female surgeon has commissioned a £1.4 million kennel for her two Great Danes, next to her second home on the exclusive Lower Mill Estate, near Cirencester. The kennel has a Jacuzzi, a plasma screen TV, thermostatically controlled beds, a £150,000 music system and a security gate with retinal scanner." (*Times*, 26 November) "Fears are being raised there could be a jump in the winter death toll. An Age Concern poll of 2,300 people found many over 60s were worried about being able to heat their homes because of soaring energy prices. And with a one of the coldest winters for some years predicted, the charity said the death toll could rise. It comes after figures for England and Wales suggested there was a 7% jump in extra deaths last year despite a relatively mild winter." (*BBC News*, 27 November) A pampered life for dogs but no thermostatically controlled beds for shivering old workers, that is how capitalism operates.

Free Lunch



by Rigg

socialist standard



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THEY RUN! THEY SCREAM! THEY HIDE!

A SPECTRE IS HAUNTING RELIGION

TWO HUNDRED YEARS A.D.



SPECIAL ISSUE: THE WORLD AFTER DARWIN

MARX AND ENGELS ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES
WHAT DARWIN SAID. DARWIN AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN



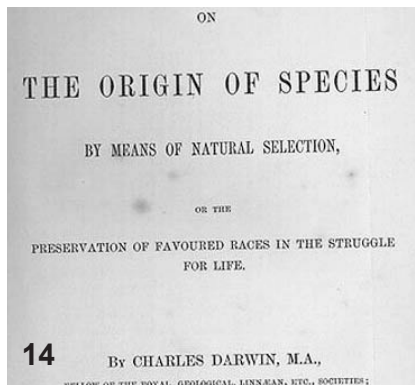
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 7 February** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial Just another war?

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE that the conflict in Gaza should command such worldwide attention. As well as the genuine suffering incurred (overwhelmingly on the Palestinian side) this war has had a particular resonance.

The conflict kicked off while many people around the world were sleeping off their Christmas celebrations. The usual pious words of peace and goodwill spoken by popes, queens and presidents only a few hours earlier choked in their throats that bit sooner than normal, as the missiles from the Holy Land started to fall on Gaza, deep and crisp and even.

But, let's not lose sight of the fact that the Gaza conflict is just one of over 20 wars underway at present. Fatalities in this conflict so far have been a small fraction of the approximately 100-300,000 direct and indirect war fatalities that capitalism can reliably promise humanity for 2009.

War isn't some sort of exceptional occurrence for capitalism. Just as recession is an essential and unavoidable part of the economics of capitalism, rather than some sort of aberration, so war is a normal consequence of the international political tensions inherent within capitalism. The legitimate global ruling class comprises various different gangs of pirates, oligarchs, commens, princes, dictators, and gangsters. Each of whom funds its local government or political administration to best protect its interests.

That's not to say we shouldn't try and do anything. But for our efforts to have any success they must be based on a recognition as to the root cause that ultimately connects all these conflicts – a world owned by, and divided up between,

the small global minority who live off that monopoly to the exclusion of the vast majority. The global working class is left to do the dirty work for the owning class, the employing class and the officer class – working in their factories and dying in their armies.

It may be tempting to support the underdog and take sides with the Philistine David v Israeli Goliath. But such thinking blinds us to the real causes of what is only the latest flare-up in the particularly brutal history of the Middle East.

Israel and the region's security has strategic implications far beyond its borders. Enormous existing and potential oil wealth is present in the region as a whole. And with \$4bn worth of natural gas reportedly discovered some 30 miles directly offshore from the Gaza Strip there is – for many governments around the world – definitely something worth fighting for.

World socialists are revolted by the violence of the Gaza conflict. We condemn both sides and denounce the senseless killing of our fellow workers. History shows that in times of war, working-class interests are never served by workers throwing in their lot with nationalist or other political leaders of capitalism, whether they are well-funded like the Israeli state, or weaker like Hamas. The slaughter in Gaza underlines yet again the urgent need to work for a world without nations and nationalism, bosses and workers. Instead of a "two-state" solution, world socialists offer the "no-state" solution as the only one that can ever give the Middle East lasting peace.



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Darwin in the pink

It seems fitting, in the year of Darwinus Laudatus, that the new incumbent of the White House is stuffing his team with scientists and proclaiming that science is top of the agenda again. Well, it won't bring on socialism, but at least those who seemed obsessed with visions of a new religious Inquisition in the West can

stop worrying for the moment. Nature too is sticking two fingers up at creationists who have problems struggling with the facts of life, by recently producing two entirely new species that, as they say, you couldn't even make up. One, a bizarre pink iguana, happens to live on the one Galapagos island Darwin didn't manage to visit. The other is a mirror-eyed spook-fish in the deep ocean with an entirely novel means of discerning sharp images using light reflector arrays (*New Scientist*, 10 January). Advocates of Intelligent Design will easily explain pink iguanas (God was having a camp day) but in the case of the highly complex

mirror mechanism, the obvious question would be: why did our Intelligent Designer not do things the easy way and just have the fish live somewhere it could see by normal means? Recent footage has also emerged of a unique venomous mammal, the Hispaniolan solenodon, suspected of being the last surviving relic of a branch of mammalia with a very uncuddly characteristic. Will ID supporters kindly explain why The Creator can't seem to make up his mind, and keeps producing hybrid experiments that look suspiciously random and unplanned? Whatever next, a mammal that lays eggs?

Biofuels at bedrock in ratings

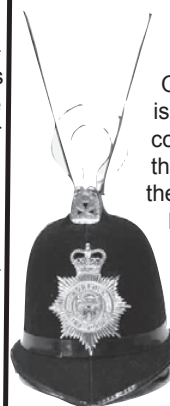
Speaking of random and unplanned, capitalism can usually be relied on to filter out all the smart solutions and pick the dumbest, amid a fanfare of speeches about innovation and progress. It seems hardly a moment since biofuels were the ingenious answer to everyone's oil crisis. Now a new study suggests that they are the worst possible way of dealing with the problem, even taking coal or nuclear power into account (*SciDev*, *Biofuels bottom of the heap in impact study*, 7 January)

Free is cheaper

Now where have we heard that one before? It's nice to see that the *digitali* are still plugging the idea that because costs are heading towards zero soon everything will be free, citing such free services as Google by way of example. Chris Anderson, editor of *Wired* magazine, is the latest to put this no-longer-very-revolutionary idea in his new book *Free: the Future of a Radical Price* (*BBC Radio 4*, *In Business*, 8 January). Of course, he means everything *digital* will be free. About the real world of food, clothing and heating he has no comment to make. No doubt it will comfort the refugees of Darfur that they can access free pictures of food whenever they like. What Anderson and his colleagues could usefully do is extrapolate from their own cosily self-absorbed cyberworld to ask what socialists ask – couldn't we do the same thing for tins of beans as terabytes? After all, production costs in material goods also have a tendency to fall over time. Besides, there is also the question of what you mean by free. Users don't pay to use Google, but two Google searches are as carbon heavy as boiling a kettle, and the global IT industry produces as much greenhouse gas as the global airline industry (*BBC Online*, *'Carbon cost' of Google revealed*, 12 January).

Why so popular a solution then? Because it was cheap, the land was already in cultivation for something else, and it was a zero-tech, zero investment changeover. Wind power comes out best, which is perhaps no surprise. If we were to plant wind turbines in every government meeting room in the world, we could probably get all our energy for free.

PC I-Plod



One thing which is patently becoming less rather than more free is the matter of civil liberties, with police being encouraged by a new European directive to spend more time hacking into the public's

private computers (*BBC Online*, *Police 'encouraged' to hack more*, 5 January). Not that it

will do them much good. Even if your firewall doesn't keep them out, they probably couldn't use the information anyway because they have no way to prove they didn't put it there themselves. That's if they don't lose the information first. Anyone paranoid enough to believe that Big Brother has already arrived will feel a heartwarming glow at the latest in a long line of government security boops. When the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit was shut down and replaced by the Serious Organised Crime Agency in 2006, the government did not bother to keep the old NHTCU webname and it was bought by a German company. However, the government forgot to mention this to anyone, so whenever any agency including the BBC attempted to tip off the government about suspected cyber-fraud or other criminal japes, they were in fact sending this potentially explosive information to a private commercial enterprise (*New Scientist*, 3 January).



God on our side?

Dear Editors

Having just read with interest the article *God and the Market* (November's *Socialist Standard*) I felt that socialists may like to hear my views and opinions.

As an adult, I made the conscious decision to be baptised. That was ten years ago, and ever since then I have struggled with my faith because of the blatant hypocrisy that we all know exists within the Church. Indeed, Robert Tressell's portrayal of the Church in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is, in my opinion, not too much of an exaggeration. Jesus Christ and his disciples spoke very plainly about the familial relationship of all people under our parent God, the requirement for "Children of God" to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), to shun riches (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13; Acts 8:20; 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5) and to care for all people (1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 4:7-21). Such is the true Christian faith: it does not seek the division of humanity in any way. True Christian faith, I believe, is socialist.

But Church practice is very dif-

ferent from the way it should be, as you all know. The Church, the faithful bride of Christ, has unwittingly embraced capitalism and is unable (or its leaders are unwilling) to escape from its grasp. These leaders, among other things, commit "daylight robbery" by sending out "tax-collectors" with bright shining plates during each act of worship to take money from their "beloved" flocks, and they celebrate (or, as they say, "Remember") the inhumanity of war and support future killing among siblings, even going as far as "blessing" destructive weapons (e.g. battle-ships). At the heart of each spiritual community is the local church, and how many local churches resemble market places? How would Jesus react to such things (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-16)?

To be fair there are groups within the Church who do remain faithful. These include the Pax Christi movement, Tearfund and the Mothers' Union. But unfortunately, the humanity of such groups as these is hidden within the shadows of the Church's capitalist image within the world.

From its earliest beginnings, the Church applied the pious practice of

lending without adding interest. But it wasn't long before Church authorities saw this practice as "bad for business". In the same way, I wonder how long it will be before the greed of Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury and the Anglican Bishop Wallace Benn of Lewes (who claimed that the credit crunch is God's punishment for society's obsession with money (Premier Radio News, 29th October 2008)) resurfaces and they change their minds.

PAUL BOYCE, Lincoln

Reply:

We agree that what evidence there is seems to show that the first Christians practised a form of what Kautsky in his *Foundations of Christianity* called "a communism in articles of consumption", but it also shows that they were more interested in the world "to come", which they believed to be imminent, than in changing the corrupt (as they saw it) world in which they lived. The case for socialism, as the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production, is a secular doctrine based on the facts of the situation today and not on quotations from the sacred texts of one particular religion

The politics of poverty in Zambia

THE SUDDEN collapse of copper prices and the consequent depreciation of the Zambian currency, the kwacha, has meant that the election promises made by the newly-elected MMD President of Zambia, Rupiah Banda, won't be achieved in the space of three years before the 2011 general election.

The recent increase in meal prices from K56,000 to K75,000 per breakfast bag (25kg) led to riots in Kitwe.

President Banda seems to be a man devoid of pragmatic ideas and that can be instanced when he appointed the discredited veteran politician Vernon Mwaanga as parliamentary chief whip. Indeed, Mwaanga and Banda were early groomed by the first President Kenneth Kaunda. Mwaanga had served in every administration ever since 1964. He was only dismissed by the last President Mwanawasa in 2007. Mwaanga is a wealthy and respected Tloua tribesman.

Most people in Zambia feel that Banda has brought UNIP back into power—Banda was a staunch UNIP politician (foreign minister in 1972) and was living in retirement ever since the exit of the UNIP government in 1991. He only came into active politics in 2006 when the late Mwanawasa appointed him as vice-president.

Unexpected was the dismissal of the versatile finance minister Nyanda Magande together with the outspoken female minister of local government, Silver Masebo. Indeed, the reconstituted cabinet is a pale-faced assemblage of yes men.

The MMD government has lost touch with the vast majority of Zambian workers and it seems that Rupiah Banda's government will be subjected to unexpected

economic crises that will jeopardise his chances of winning the 2011 general election.

But what many workers and students in Lusaka and the copper belt mining towns do not understand is the fact that the current economic and social problems confronting them cannot be resolved by the opposition Patriotic Front leader Michael Sata. There isn't any political difference between the ruling MMD and PF. Both Banda and Sata are old and tired wealthy politicians seduced by political and economic privileges. The sudden collapse of copper prices has led to widespread job losses (redundancies) in the mining sector. It is just in such unforeseen economic misfortunes that many irate workers think that the PF leader can create economic wonders. Economic liberalisation entails free market economy in which demand and supply comes to determine commodity prices. The government of the day cannot impose itself upon the market to fix a minimum price. That is why the increase in meal prices cannot be restrained by the MMD government.

In 1991, Western-sponsored economic growth programmes impact negatively upon the ordinary Zambian workers and peasants—economic growth in Zambia is enjoyed by the foreign industrial elites (through tax exemptions).

Gross inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth mark the political, racial, ethnic and religious frustrations taking place in many countries in Africa today. The only way-out is a classless, stateless and moneyless society—socialism.

KEPHAS MULENGA



The War In Gaza: Propaganda And Realities

Why has the Israeli government launched Operation "Molten Lead"?

According to Israeli propaganda, it was the only way to stop rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza. Some are sceptical about this version of events. The truce negotiated with Hamas last June held for four months, they say, and could probably have been maintained and extended were it not for Israel's military incursion on 4 November and its continuing siege of Gaza.

There is some evidence to suggest that the operation was a "war of choice," planned well in advance for the purpose of destroying Hamas in Gaza. Israeli military historian Zeev Maoz has traced a long history of Israel using provocative measures to trigger reactions in order to create a pretext for military action (*Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security and Foreign Policy*, University of Michigan Press, 2006).

Another strategic war

In a previous article we drew the distinction between "resource wars" that are fought directly for control over specific resources and "strategic wars" that reflect a long-term power struggle between rival capitalist states. To take recent examples, the "mobile war" in eastern Congo was a resource war while the war in Georgia was a strategic war.

The factors underlying this war have to do both with resources and with strategic rivalry. Israel and the Palestinian factions are manoeuvring for control over offshore gas deposits. But there is also a strategic dimension that cannot be understood adequately at the local level.

Hamas is an integral part of the Islamist forces in the Moslem world. It arose as an offshoot of Egypt's Moslem Brotherhood, which now poses the main threat to the US-oriented Mubarak regime. That is a big reason why this regime, like Jordan and the Palestine Authority, more or less openly support Israel's assault on Hamas.

Hamas also depends heavily on support from Iran. Like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran's clients in Iraq, it serves as a vehicle of Iran's effort to establish itself as the leading power in the Middle East. This helps to explain the strength of US and EU support for Israel in this war. So there is some basis to Israel's claim that it is fighting on behalf of an international "anti-extremist" – that is, anti-Islamist and anti-Iran – coalition.

The propaganda war

As always, the physical war is combined with a propaganda war. The message is drummed into people that "we" have no choice but to defend ourselves against an enemy bent on genocide. In the Western media the word "terrorist" routinely precedes any reference to Hamas. Of course, both sides are terrorist in the sense of targeting civilians. Israel uses terror

on a much larger scale than Hamas, though that is solely because it has much greater military capacity.

In principle, either side could have avoided the war by submitting to the other side's political demands. It was a war of choice on both sides. Hamas could probably have saved "their people" from the fury of the Israeli war machine by ceding power in Gaza to the Palestine Authority. I make this point not to diminish Israel's direct responsibility for its atrocities, but rather to highlight how little all the Palestinian as well as Israeli leaders really care about ordinary people.

Elections – a nasty trick

In demonizing Hamas the pro-Israel propagandists face a little problem. Earlier they themselves reluctantly granted Hamas a certain legitimacy in connection with its victory in the January 2006 elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council. Now they just say that Hamas seized power in a coup and delete any mention of the elections. In fact, it was the US that insisted on the elections, perhaps not anticipating the outcome.

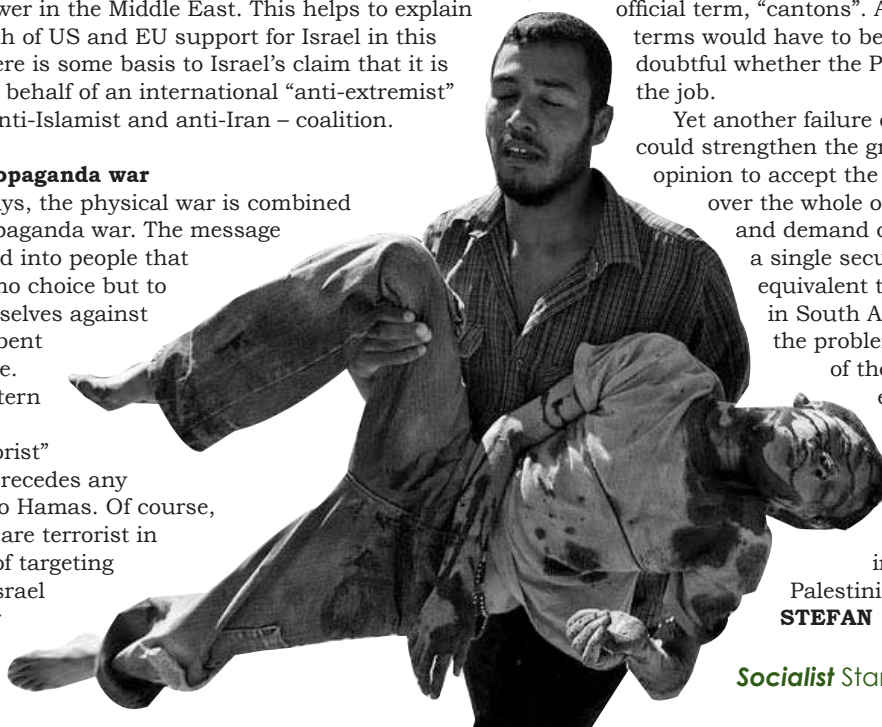
Capitalism as a system is inherently undemocratic, because it concentrates real power in the hands of a small ruling and owning class. In general, elections may be welcomed as introducing a small element of democracy into this undemocratic system. People in Gaza, however, have been subjected to starvation, bombing, and other forms of harsh punishment in effect for having voted for candidates that the sponsors of the elections did not want. Under the circumstances, these elections were a nasty trick that had little to do with democracy.

A secular state?

It appears that Obama will make another attempt to revive the "peace process," which is supposed to lead to a Palestinian state alongside Israel. But unless he is willing to put Israel under very strong pressure to withdraw from all the territory occupied in 1967, such a state will amount to little more than a string of ghettos or, to use the official term, "cantons". A two-state solution on these terms would have to be imposed by force, and it is doubtful whether the Palestine Authority is up to the job.

Yet another failure of the "peace process" could strengthen the growing trend in Palestinian opinion to accept the reality of Israel's control over the whole of what used to be Palestine and demand citizenship rights within a single secular state. This would be equivalent to the ending of apartheid in South Africa but would not solve the problems faced by the majority of the population. Not that the emergence of such a secular state is easy to envisage at present in view of the prevalence of ethnic-supremacist, sectarian and even racist outlooks in both Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian society.

STEFAN



KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES



OH NO! THE JONESES HAVE GOT A BIGGER PEOPLE CARRIER THAN US!



QUICK! PUT THAT CLASSICAL MUSIC RECITAL POSTER IN THE WINDOW. BUT DON'T OBSCURE THE VIEW OF THE ANTIQUE ROCKING HORSE.



HELLO THERE! WE'RE JUST WAITING FOR OUR ORGANIC VEG TO BE DELIVERED ...



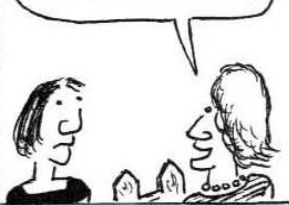
... AND OUR NEWSLETTER FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE.



WELL, WE'RE JUST WAITING FOR LITTLE OLIVER TO GET HOME FROM SCHOOL. HE HAS A 12 MILE JOURNEY, YOU KNOW. AND HE'S ONLY AGED 10.



WELL, OUR LITTLE HARRY HAS A 25 MILE JOURNEY FROM SCHOOL. AND HE'S ONLY 9.



OLIVER IS DOING VERY WELL AT HIS PRIVATE SCHOOL, THOUGH. WE'RE SURE HE'LL GO TO A GOOD UNIVERSITY.



WE'RE GIVING HARRY EXTRA PRIVATE TUITION. HE GETS 2 HOURS EVERY EVENING.



OH, OLIVER GETS 3 HOURS TUITION AN EVENING. AND EXTRA AT THE WEEKEND.



WELL, IF HARRY DOESN'T MAKE IT TO OXBRIDGE, WE SHALL COMMIT SUICIDE. AND WE'VE TOLD HIM SO.



COME ON DEAR. LET'S GO INSIDE. THERE'S SOMETHING ON THE T.V. ...



WE DON'T HAVE A T.V. WE JUST SIT IN THE EVENINGS LISTENING TO HARRY PLAY THE PIANO. WITH A REAL COAL FIRE IN THE BACKGROUND.



WE ONLY BURN WOOD ON OUR REAL FIRE!



WELL WE REFUSE POINT BLANK TO HAVE HARRY VACCINATED -FOR ANYTHING!



WELL, OLIVER BROKE HIS NOSE PLAYING RUGGER LAST WEEK. WE'RE SO PROUD!



WE'RE SAVING EVERY PENNY TO SEND HARRY TO A PUBLIC SCHOOL, SO HE CAN BE SEXUALLY ABUSED BY OLDER BOYS.



AH! HERE'S OLIVER NOW!



... AND HERE'S HARRY!

MUM! I WANT TO BECOME A TRUCK DRIVER!



... AND I WANT TO BECOME A PLUMBER!

Pieces together

HALLELUAH IT'S A SLUMP

"The sudden crush of worshipers packing the small evangelical Shelter Rock Church in Manhasset, N.Y. — a Long Island hamlet of yacht clubs and hedge fund managers — forced the pastor to set up an overflow room with closed-circuit TV and 100 folding chairs, which have been filled for six Sundays straight. In Seattle, the Mars Hill Church, one of the fastest-growing evangelical churches in the country, grew to 7,000 members this fall, up 1,000 in a year. At the Life Christian Church in West Orange, N.J., prayer requests have doubled — almost all of them aimed at getting or keeping jobs. Like evangelical churches around the country, the three churches have enjoyed steady growth over the last decade. But since September, pastors nationwide say they have seen such a burst of new interest that they find themselves contending with powerful conflicting emotions — deep empathy and quiet excitement — as they re-encounter an old piece of religious lore: Bad times are good for evangelical churches." (*New York Times*, 14 December)

BEGGING FOR WORK

"Paul Nawrocki says he's beyond the point where he cares about humiliation. That's why he weekly takes a 90-minute train ride to New York, where he walks the streets wearing a sandwich board that advertises his plight: The former toy-industry executive needs a job. "Almost homeless," reads the sign. "Looking for employment. Very experienced operations and administration manager." Wearing a suit and tie under the sign, Nawrocki — who was in the toy industry 36 years before being laid off in February — stands on Manhattan corners for hours, hoping to pass resumes to interested passers-by." (*CNN.com*, 6 December)

ANOTHER LABOUR FAILURE

"Social deprivation, child poverty and long-term reliance on benefits in parts of Britain are not alleviated or are increasing a decade after Labour pledged reforms to tackle them, a report shows. Many of the poorest households are not being reached by government initiatives to tackle deprivation, with most key measures now making no progress. Of the 56 poverty indicators tracked by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, including the number of children in low-income families, young adults unemployed and children excluded from school, three quarters have stalled or are getting worse." (*Times*, 8 December).

SIGN ON OR STARVE

"Sgt. Ryan Nyhus spent 14 months patrolling the deadly streets of Baghdad, where five members of his platoon were shot and one died. As bad as that was, he would rather go back there than take his chances in this brutal job market. Nyhus re-enlisted last Wednesday, and in so doing joined the growing ranks of those choosing to stay in the U.S. military because of the bleak economy. "In the Army, you're always guaranteed a steady paycheck and a job," said the 21-year-old Nyhus. "Deploying's something that's going to happen. That's a fact of life in the Army — a fact of life in the infantry." In 2008, as the stock market cratered and the housing market collapsed, more young members of the Army, Air Force and Navy decided to re-up." (*Yahoo News*, 2 December)



Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON
Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Sekforde Arms, London. EC1 (Nearest Underground: Farringdon).
Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 12th and 26th. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk
South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811
West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY
Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

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Bolton. Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589
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Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB
Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP
Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

EAST ANGLIA

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Cambridge. Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

NORTHERN IRELAND

Newtownabbey. Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>
Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com
Ayrshire. D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freeuk.com
Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643
West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

Cardiff and District. John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

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World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.
World Socialist Party of the United States P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. E-mail: wspboston@covid.net

cooking the books

Free money for everyone?

There's nothing like a slump for currency crank ideas to flourish. The contradiction between unused resources and unmet needs is so glaring that the solution seems to be to give people more money to spend (whereas it's to produce just for use, not for sale, so making money redundant).

One such theory, popular in the last Great Depression of the 1930s, was "Social Credit", as expounded by Major Douglas (1879-1952). This was a proposal for the State to take over the role of the banks in supposedly creating purchasing power and using the profits that would otherwise have gone to the banks to pay all citizens a "social dividend". As this is based on the idea that banks can "create credit" out of nothing by a mere stroke of the pen, which the current credit crunch has exploded, this is not so popular this time.

Another such theory was that of Silvio Gesell (1862-1930). Basing himself on the experience of the Great Depression of the 1880s (yes, there's been more than one), his proposal to get people to spend was that currency notes should gradually devalue if they were not spent within a given time. He was to be the Finance Minister in the short-lived Munich Soviet of 1919. Keynes, who had a soft spot for currency cranks, wrote: "I believe that the future will learn more from the spirit of Gesell than from that of Marx" (*General Theory*, p. 355).

Though probably more influenced by the vouchers issued by the chain stores than by Gesell, the economic journalist Simon Jenkins has been plugging a similar idea in his regular column in the *Guardian*. He wants the government to give consumers "three-month spending coupons, say of £300 a month." He thinks this giving people vouchers they have to spend within three months is a better way of getting people to spend than cutting taxes or increasing benefits which they could save.

An extra £300 a month to spend for everybody! A party could win an election by promising that. The proposal is feasible but, if it ever comes in, it won't be at that level, as can be seen from Taiwan. According to the *Taipei Times* (19 December):

"Every citizen and foreign spouse qualifying for the voucher will receive six red-colored vouchers with a face value of NT\$500 each and three coffee-colored NT\$200 vouchers in a 'lucky envelope' with 'Happy New Year' in Chinese characters on it to symbolize auspiciousness. The government will distribute the NT\$3,600 in consumer vouchers on Jan. 18, one week ahead of the Lunar New Year to boost spending." (<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2008/12/19/2003431492>).

At the time of writing 3600 Taiwan dollars is worth £74. As the vouchers have to be spent by the end of September, that's about £8 a month (rather less than £300) or £2 a week. Wow!

All these more or less cranky proposals are based on the mistaken assumption that a country can avoid a slump by increasing spending. Let's have some common sense from Marx:

"It is sheer tautology to say that crises are caused by the scarcity of effective consumption, or of effective consumers. The capitalist system does not know any other modes of consumption than effective ones, except that of *sub forma pauperis* or of the swindler. That commodities are unsaleable means only that no effective purchasers have been found for them, i.e., consumers (since commodities are bought in the final analysis for productive or individual consumption). But if one were to attempt to give this tautology the semblance of a profounder justification by saying that the working-class receives too small a portion of its own product and the evil would be remedied as soon as it receives a larger share of it and its wages increase in consequence, one could only remark that crises are always prepared by precisely a period in which wages rise generally and the working-class actually gets a larger share of that part of the annual product which is intended for consumption. From the point of view of these advocates of sound and "simple" (!) common sense, such a period should rather remove the crisis." (*Capital*, Vol II, Chapter 20, section 4).

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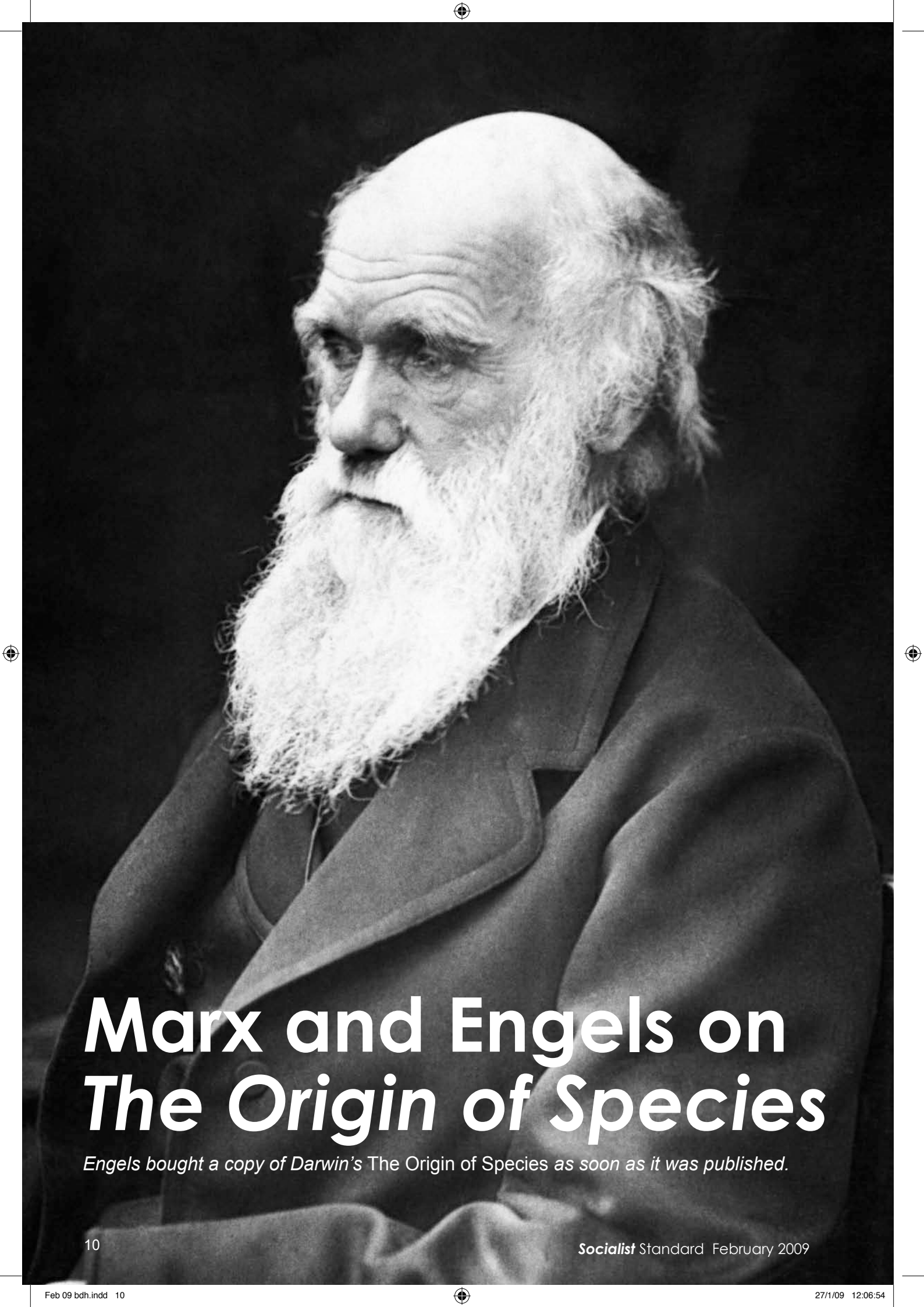
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Marx and Engels on *The Origin of Species*

Engels bought a copy of Darwin's The Origin of Species as soon as it was published.

Two books of importance were published in 1859, one in June and the other in November. Each one stands at the opposite pole of popularity at the time they were published. And this contrast has persisted up to the present day. One hundred and fifty years after their publication, one is being celebrated as one of the most significant and audacious books ever to be published; the other is virtually forgotten.

Both were written with some degree of reluctance by their authors, requiring pressure from their friends and supporters. Great things were expected of both. However, only one of them fulfilled them.

The first book, published in German, was by Karl Marx: *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. This was to be the first instalment of a series of pamphlets, presenting what was to be a withering assault on the ideological foundations of capitalist society. But the beginnings were not good. Marx even had to write to his publisher to find out whether it had been published or not. And then there were the reviews, or rather their absence. Writing to Lassalle on the 6th of November 1859, Marx wrote: "I expected to be attacked or criticised but not to be utterly ignored, which, moreover, is bound to have a serious effect on sales." But even his followers were disappointed.

The contrast with the other book could not be greater. Charles Darwin, spurred into action by a letter he received the year before from fellow naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, had produced what he called an abstract of his work of the past twenty years. He had brought before the public gaze what he would have preferred to keep hidden, anxious as to how it would be received. But Wallace's letter had forced his hand, and he had to publish.

The *Origin of Species* was brought out on the 24 November in a print run of 1250 copies. Earlier that month, Marx had written of the total silence that his book had received. The reception for Darwin's book could not have been different. Within 24 hours all the copies had been sold. The Darwinian Age had begun. As the modest Darwin would not have said: *Après moi, le deluge!*"

First Response

It was Engels who was the first to respond to *The Origin*. He had always taken a keen interest in developments in the natural sciences and their relationship to his and Marx's materialist conception (some commentators have seen this interest in science as an importation of

positivism, and as incompatible with Marx's view). Engels had bought one of the copies of the first edition, and within the month, he wrote to Marx on the 12 December:

"Darwin, by the way, whom I'm reading just now, is absolutely splendid. There was one aspect of teleology that has yet to be demolished, and that has now been done. Never before has so grandiose an attempt been made to demonstrate historical evolution in Nature, and certainly never to such good effect. One does, of course, have to put up with the crude English method."

Darwin, Darwin, Darwin

On the publication of *The Origin*, Marx was involved in other work. But when he had a chance to read it a year later, his assessment of it was similar to that of Engels, to whom he wrote on the 19 December, 1860:

"In my times of trial [illness] during the last four weeks - I have read all

"One does, of course, have to put up with the crude English method."

sorts of things. Among others, Darwin's book on Natural Selection. Although it is developed in a crude English way, this is the book that contains the natural-history foundation of our view point."

A month later on the 16 January, 1861 he wrote to Lassalle in similar terms:

"Darwin's work is most important and suits my purpose in that it provides a basis in natural science for the historical class struggle. One does, of course, have to put up with the clumsy English style of argument. Despite all its shortcomings, it is here that, for the first time, 'teleology' in natural science is not only dealt a mortal blow but its rational meaning is empirically explained."

What is significant about the assessment of Marx on Darwin, compared to that of Engels, is that it is Marx who is the first to relate Darwin's theory with his and Engels' materialist conception. For Engels it is only the anti-teleological content of *The Origin* that is noted.

That Marx took more than a passing interest in the Darwin phenomenon is revealed in the recollections of

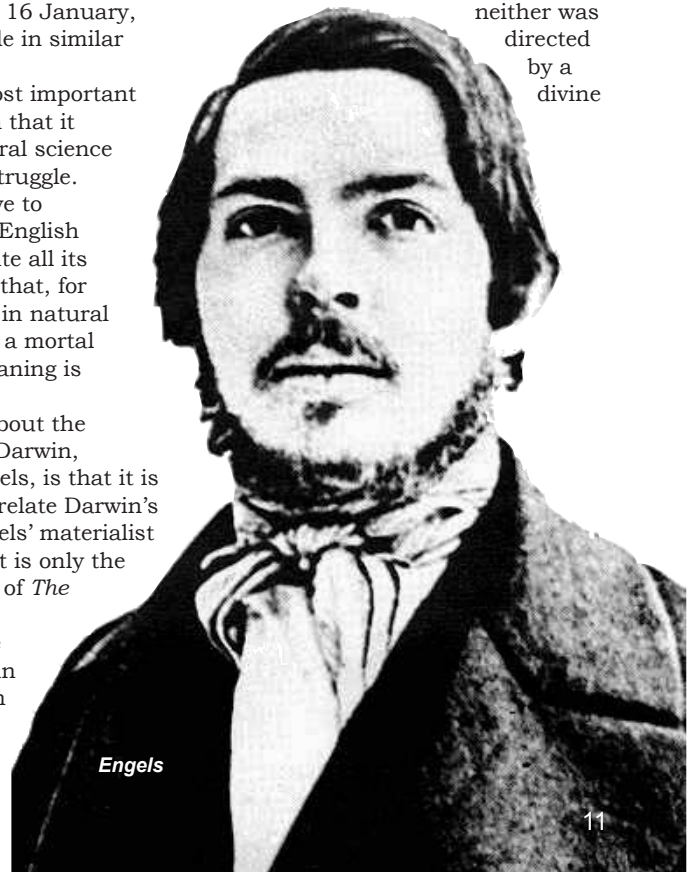
his German supporter, Wilhelm Liebknecht. In his *Karl Marx: Biographical Memoirs* (1896; English translation 1901, pp. 91-92) he wrote:

"Marx was one of the first to comprehend the importance of Darwin's investigations. Even before 1859 ... Marx had recognized the epochal importance of Darwin And when Darwin drew the consequences of his investigations and presented them to the public we spoke for months of nothing else but Darwin and the revolutionizing power of his scientific conquests. I emphasize this, because 'radical enemies' have spread the idea that Marx, from a certain jealousy, acknowledged the merit of Darwin very reluctantly and in a very limited degree."

In addition, he states that Marx attended the Popular Lectures of Liebig, Moleschott and Huxley and that these "were names mentioned in our circle as often as Ricardo, Adam Smith, McCulloch and the Scotch and Irish economists" (p.91). In the autumn of 1862, Marx also attended a series of six lectures on Darwin by T.H. Huxley.

Darwin's OK, but....

For both Marx and Engels, the most significant feature of Darwin's work was the way in which it dealt a death-blow to the theological teleology which had blighted almost all forms of thinking about the human and non-human world. There was no divine plan which gave direction to human action and nature was not a set of fixed entities. There was a history of human development and a history of natural development, and neither was directed by a divine



Engels

purpose.

But the rejection of religious teleology did not imply that there was no order or development in the human and natural domains, where everything was just a series of random accidents. Rather, the explanation of the order and development was now put down to processes within each domain, without the need to refer to the outside influence of a divine being. For Darwin, the explanation for the evolution of species was primarily, but not exclusively, to do with the process of natural selection.

While Marx was happy to accept the anti-theological implications of Darwin's work, he could not fully accept everything. It must be remembered that Marx was thoroughly educated in the philosophy of Aristotle and the post-Aristotelians, and had completed his doctoral thesis in this area. The influence of naturalistic Greek philosophy was to remain with him, and he did not reject Aristotle in the way that the 17th century British atomistic materialists did in their rejection of medieval Aristotelianism (the adaptation of Aristotle to Christian theology).

The importance of Marx's Aristotelianism is seen in what he saw as a limitation of Darwin's work. On the 7 August 1866, Marx wrote to Engels:

"A very important work which I will send you (but on condition that you return it, as it is not my property) as soon as I have

made the necessary notes, is: P. Tremaux, *Origine et Transformations de l'Homme et des autres Etres* (Paris, 1865). In spite all the shortcomings that I have noted, it represents a very significant advance over Darwin. . . . Progress, which Darwin regards as purely accidental, is essential here In its historical and political applications far more significant and pregnant than Darwin."

The relevant notion here is that of "essential". For Marx, any scientific explanation had to include elements of both the "essential" and the "accidental". But for the majority of scientists in the 19th century, any element of Aristotle was unacceptable.

Despite the fulsome praise which Marx heaped on Tremaux's work, it did not have any impact on the scientific world, and it sank without

"Marx was the first to relate Darwin's theory with his and Engels' materialist conception"

trace (a reassessment of this work can be found at philsci-archives.pitt.edu/archive/00003806/01/tremaux-on-species.pdf). And Engels, too, tore it to shreds (Engels to Marx, 2 October 1866). Marx tried one more time to persuade Engels of the importance of Tremaux's work: "an idea which needs only to be formulated to acquire permanent scientific status" (Marx to Engels, 3rd October 1866).

Malthus and Darwin

Although the initial response of both Marx and Engels to Darwin's work was positive, further reading brought out criticisms. For Marx, Darwin relied too much on the "accidental" in his explanation (see above), but it is not clear whether Engels shared this Aristotelian criticism. Both, however, were in agreement when it came to Darwin's use of the population theories of the Reverend Thomas Malthus. Both despised Malthus. As early as 1844, Engels had called Malthus's theory, which he saw as the "keystone of the liberal system of free trade", as "this vile, infamous theory, this hideous blasphemy against nature and mankind" ("Outlines of a Critique of Political

Economy", 1844).

Writing to Engels on 18 June 1862, Marx commented:

"I'm amused that Darwin, at whom I've been taking another look, should say that he also applies the 'Malthusian' theory to plants and animals, as though in Mr Malthus's case the whole thing didn't lie in its not being applied to plants and animals, but only - with its geometric progression - to humans as against plants and animals. It is remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthusian 'struggle for existence'. It is Hobbes' bellum omnium contra omnes and is reminiscent of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, in which civil society figures as an 'intellectual animal kingdom', whereas, in Darwin, the animal kingdom figures as civil society."

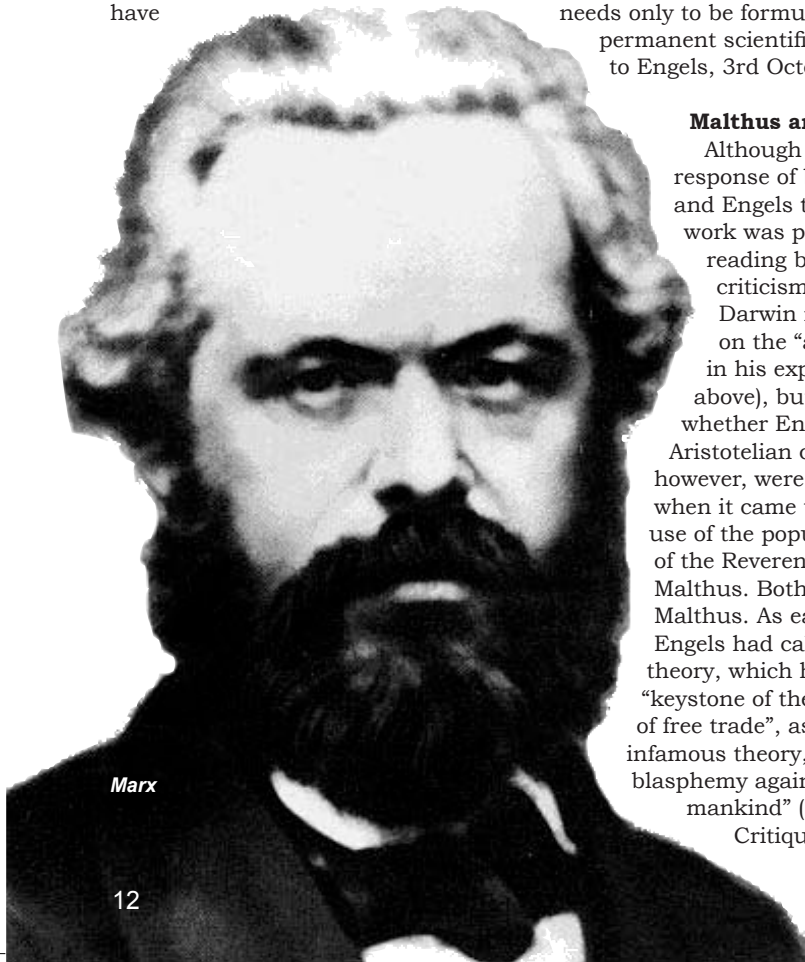
Darwin's theory, then, was compromised by the importation of ideological capitalist theory. This did not imply that what Darwin said was wholly invalidated; only that the Malthusian justification had to be jettisoned. This was essential, as the Malthusian justification of the struggle for existence in nature could be used to justify the same principle in society as capitalist social relations. This was seen by Engels:

"When this conjurer's trick has been performed... the same theories are transferred back again from organic nature into history and it is now claimed that their validity as eternal laws of human society has been proved. The puerility of this procedure is so obvious that not a word need be said about it. (Engels to Pyotr Lavrov, 12-17 November, 1875)

Engels went on to discuss the relationship of Malthus and Darwin to Marxism at greater length in Part 1 (especially section VII, *Natural Philosophy. The Organic World*) of *Anti-Duhring* (1878, English edition 1894), and to explore the evolution of the human species in the posthumously published *Dialectics of Nature*, in particular the section "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man", originally written in 1876.

In the work published during his lifetime, Marx refers to Darwin only in *Capital*, volume 1, and here only in two footnotes (Penguin edition, pages 461 and 493-494). He talks of the "epoch-making work" of Darwin and of how it directed his attention to the "history of natural technology, i.e., the formation of the organs of plants and animals which serve as the instruments of production for

continued on page 21



Marx

Darwin and the Intelligent Design Brigade

Evolution is perhaps the strongest theory in modern science, but still the most controversial. Why after all this time does it still generate such ferocious opposition?

Christian Right Lobbies To Overturn Second Law Of Thermodynamics

The second law of thermodynamics, a fundamental scientific principle stating that entropy increases over time as organized forms decay into greater states of randomness, has come under fire from conservative Christian groups, who are demanding that the law be repealed.

Calling the second law of thermodynamics "a deeply disturbing scientific principle that threatens our children's understanding of God's universe as a benevolent and loving place," they are spearheading a nationwide grassroots campaign to have the law removed from high-school physics textbooks. The plan has already met with significant support in the state legislatures of Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee, Georgia, and Mississippi."

Before you start worrying, this was a satirical item from *The Onion*, back in 2000, aimed at religious people who reject Darwinian evolution. However it's not really an exaggeration. Religious fundamentalists who reject evolutionary theory are also rejecting geology, astronomy, Einsteinian and Newtonian physics, in fact the whole body of scientific knowledge going back to first principles, and replacing it with a couple of anonymous books and a God who, as Bill Hicks pointed out in relation to dinosaur fossils, must be a liar and a practical joker.

Yet these religious people don't choose to attack Newton, or the theory of gravity, or light, or quantum physics. Why evolution specifically? If you haven't already seen it, try watching *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial* (2007), which is freely available online. This is an award-winning documentary describing the headline-grabbing court case between parents and the School Governors in Dover, Pennsylvania in which the governors were trying to force creationist ideas into biology classes and the parents were trying to stop them.

In the end the parents won, and the creationists were humiliated. But as you follow the interviews with protagonists on both sides of this celebrated case, you begin to see what it is that motivates those on the religious side of the debate. It is fear. They are afraid that without God

as first cause there really is no relevance to life. They fear that science is taking the heart out of the human experience and replacing it with numbers. They fear that a world with no meaning is a world with no mercy.

It was fear that originally incited the famous campaigning reformer William Jennings Bryan to take the prosecution case in the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, fear that naked social darwinism would rampage across any possibility of social justice, would justify the worst excesses of unrestrained capitalism. This was the fear – and the profound misunderstanding of Darwinism – which drove Christians to break themselves against the juggernaut of science, and continues to drive them today.

It would be, from a scientific or a socialist perspective, so easy to laugh at these people as supersti-

entifically illiterate, a situation many scientists find worrying. In public surveys on the supposedly dangerous substance Dihydrogen Monoxide (DHMO), which can corrode iron and kill humans if inhaled, up to 90% of respondents voted that it should be banned (DHMO = H₂O). (Source: *New Scientist*, 27 Sept 2008, p.76).

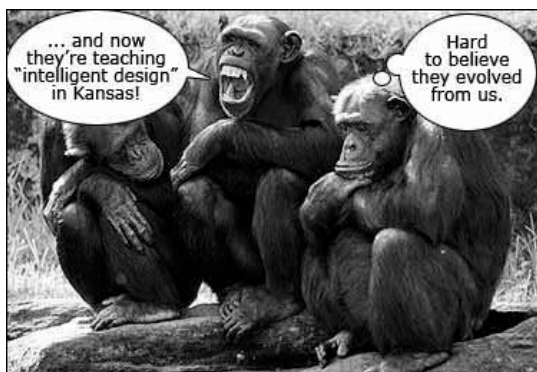
Socialists should care about the religion versus science debate because the theory of socialism is built on scientific principles, and anything which threatens rationality and evidence-based thinking must be anathema. However we should also be capable of seeing the larger picture. This isn't really about Darwin, or the laws of physics.

This is about people who need to have a reason to go on living, which capitalism isn't giving them. It's about people's need to believe in something,

which capitalism doesn't supply or has taken away. And it's about having some hope for the future, of which capitalism has none. The world really does need some intelligent design, but in its business of living, not in its biology.

Socialists, as atheists, have to understand what some scientists seem unable to grasp, that the battle of ideas is not just a battle of the mind, it's a battle for the heart. We can no more win hearts with economic methodology than scientists can with peer-reviewed research. If we scoff at notions of 'spirit' or 'soul' because these things are not measurable in laboratory experiments, we utterly miss the point. The desperate argument of creationism is at one level a comedy of human stupidity. But at a deeper level it is a tragedy, the pathos of a human condition adrift and desolate in a world which cares only about money and believes in nothing at all. This is what Moslems and Christians despair about, and this is something with which we can surely empathise. This is the 'sigh of the oppressed' in the heartless world of the 21st century. Despite appearances to the contrary, capitalism is slowly and methodically destroying religion. What we need to do, as socialists, is recognise the emotional vacuum this is creating, and strive to fill it, before something infinitely worse does.

PADDY SHANNON



tious children. After all, they cannot win. Despite the recent avalanche of anti-religious books from the likes of Dawkins, Michael Shermer, Christopher Hitchens and others, there is no real danger of a return to a religious Dark Age. Of course they are wrong. Of course their arguments are ludicrous.

At the same time it is possible to feel some compassion for the fear and the desperation these, mostly ignorant and uninformed, people have, confronted with a world they don't understand and in which they feel utterly helpless. Science to them is gas chambers, nuclear bombs, death rays, spy satellites and mind control. Wild stories about Earth-eating black holes and 'strangelets' guaranteed front-page coverage worldwide for the switching on of the Large Hadron Collider, an event only normally of interest to particle physicists.

People fear what they don't understand, and in general society is sci-

What Darwin said

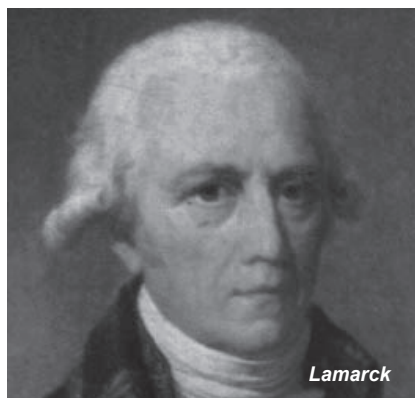
There are two misunderstandings about Darwin. First, that he invented the idea of evolution and, second, that he put forward a theory of the origin of life. He did neither. Evolution – the idea that existing forms of plants and animals had evolved from earlier forms – existed before Darwin. What Darwin did was to provide a convincing theory as to how the different species of plants and animals had come about. He said nothing about the origin of life, only that an original life-form must have existed (however it might have come into existence). Darwin's theory was that evolution came about through natural selection. In fact the term "Darwinian" is more appropriately applied to the theory of natural selection than to the theory of evolution.

Before him, some people including his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, had realised that existing species must have evolved from previously existing species. A study of the classification of life-forms by Linnaeus in the 18th century into Kingdoms, Orders, Genera and Species, based on the physical similarities between them, suggested this. But earlier evolutionists could not offer a convincing explanation as to how this came about.

Perhaps the most famous pre-Darwinian theory was that of Lamarck, who argued that new species came about through characteristics acquired during lifetime being transmitted to descendants – the theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Thus, for instance, giraffes evolved as a previous animal stretched its neck from generation to generation. The theory is not true, as can be seen from the Jews. They've been circumcising their sons for thousands of years but no Jew has ever been born without a foreskin. Actually, it wasn't really such a laughable theory that could be dismissed in this way. Lamarck was a serious scientist and it was a valid hypothesis. In fact it was the main one going till Darwin came up with his theory 150 years ago. Engels in his *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* accepted it when he was talking about the diet of humans (and foxes) leading to them changing. Even Darwin, although a severe critic of Lamarck, was prepared to backtrack a little and conceded that it might have played a minor role in the evolution

of species. Opponents of the "you can't change human nature" argument were also attracted by it.

Lamarck was on the right track about the evolution of giraffes. It did come about gradually as he supposed, but not directly. Giraffes evolved over generations as animals with longer and longer necks survived better. Similarly, with those who saw that human behaviour did, and could, change: humans can in-



Lamarck

"Darwin said nothing about the origin of life, only that an original life-form must have existed."

herit acquired characteristics but not biologically, only culturally, through learning.

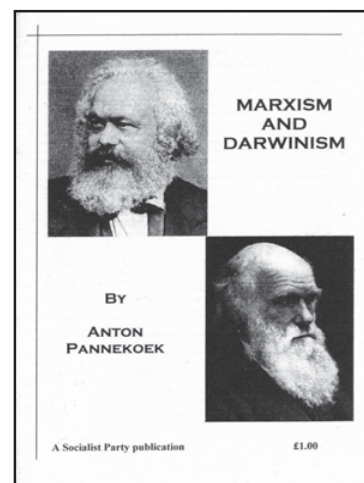
Farmers – and pigeon fanciers (with whom Darwin associated in his research) – had known long before Darwin that they could create new forms of existing plants and animals by selective breeding. Darwin's argument was that the same process had happened in nature over a long period of time – with nature doing the selecting – and that this had resulted in all the various life-forms that did exist (and had existed) as evolved forms of the original life-form. A separate "species" (as opposed to a "race" or a subspecies which was what farmers and pigeon-fanciers were creating) came into being when its members were not able to breed with the life-form from which they evolved or with other life-forms which had arisen from it. This was Darwin's theory of the origin of species.

Another misunderstanding about Darwin arises from the phrase "the

survival of the fittest", which he did use. It is often seen as meaning the survival of the physically fittest, i.e. of the strongest, but the word "fit-test" was not being used in this sense in this context. It meant rather the "aptest", or the "most fitted" to a particular environment, and it meant that relatively more of their offspring survived than did those of the less apt.

Darwin did not know, any more than the farmers and pigeon-fanciers, how selection worked. He suspected that there must be some cause of the minute changes that nature worked upon but couldn't explain how they arose. The solution was left to later scientists who, following up research by an Austrian monk, Gregor Mendel, who was experimenting at the same time as Darwin with sweet peas, came up with the gene as the unit of inheritance, with the small changes being caused by inexact copies of genes being made in certain individuals. The combination of Darwin's theory of natural selection and the gene theory is known as the "modern synthesis" and is what is defended by present-day defenders of evolution such as Richard Dawkins and other popular science writers, even though some of them have been tempted to turn "Darwinism" into a general theory of the "survival of the aptest" in all fields and not just to the evolution of species of living things.

ALB



**Marxism and Darwinism
by Anton Pannekoek.**

A pamphlet by the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

See order form on page 9 for details



The fiasco surrounding the \$50 billion hedge funds run by Bernard Madoff has been another illustration of the current instability at the heart of capitalism's financial apparatus.

Hedge funds try to bend the normal financial rules of the market in whatever way possible, though it appears Madoff went too far in what could be the world's biggest ever fraud. A massive investigation is under way into how Madoff set up and maintained a giant 'Ponzi scheme'. These schemes take their name from Charles Ponzi, an Italian immigrant to Boston in the US who, during the early 1920s, set about spreading rumours of lucrative investment opportunities he was involved in. These supposedly guaranteed what the *Wall St Journal* exposed as impossibly high returns, when in reality most of the underlying investments did not exist and Ponzi merely took people's money and used some of it to pay dividends and other returns to existing investors, while creaming the rest off for himself. This was able to continue as long as new investors were attracted to the schemes. When the flow of new investors stopped, the schemes imploded.

Although an investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission in the US is currently taking place into the precise nature of Madoff's actions, he has apparently confessed that the steady above-average returns that characterised his operation did

not reflect the underlying reality and that, over time, his funds became an elaborate sham. There is now a mammoth scramble by wealthy investors, charities and financial institutions to try to recover whatever little may be left of their original investments, with these investors notably including funds managed (or held in custody) by major banks like UBS, HSBC and RBS. Indeed, Bank Medici reportedly had \$3 billion invested with Madoff and because of this has now been taken over by the Austrian government (*Financial Times*, 3rd January).

Hedge funds

The Madoff affair is in many respects but the latest (and most spectacular) disaster to afflict the little-understood world hedge fund sector. Until last year, the most infamous previous case of a financial disaster involving a hedge fund was in 1998 when what had become the world's biggest hedge fund at the time – Long-Term Capital Management – went bust. This had been headed by a team that included two Nobel Prize winners for economics, experts in the pricing and risk-assessment of complex financial instruments. But after years of stellar returns in the 1990s the fund collapsed and had to be bailed-out by a consortium of 50 investment banks put together by the then Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan. The banks had already invested so much in LTCM (and loaned it so much money) that their own capital would have been seriously jeopardized by the losses incurred and Greenspan had to step in to help them in a way that was a precursor of recent actions during the

2008 financial crisis.

The collapse of LTCM demonstrated that those who viewed hedge funds as an esoteric but peripheral phenomenon were living in the past. Hedge funds had by this time become a hugely significant, if secretive, part of capitalism's financial operations, with the ability to exert an influence on markets well beyond that of many governments. This had previously been demonstrated to those paying attention by George Soros and his Quantum Fund, which in 1992 had made \$2 billion betting against sterling in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, forcing the UK out of the ERM and metaphorically 'breaking the Bank of England' in the process, with government intervention unable to stop the slide of sterling against the deutschmark.

So, given the ascendancy of hedge funds in recent years and the recent media fascination with them, what do they really do and why are they deemed to have so much financial power?

Hedge fund strategies

While the public conception of hedge funds is that they are highly risky investment vehicles that aim at spectacular returns for their investors, this isn't entirely true in every respect. Indeed, hedge funds gain their name from strategies aimed at 'hedging your bets', so that in theory the risk associated with one activity can be mitigated, at least in part, by others. Most hedge fund managers are not interested in relative performance measured against an accepted benchmark. In this sense, they do not aim to beat an index like the FTSE 100 or the S&P 500 in the US in the way that other investment managers running more conventional operations like unit trusts and investment trusts do (whereby, say, an annual return of minus 20 per cent would be considered a good relative performance if the market had fallen by more than 30 per cent as it did last year). Instead, hedge fund managers generally seek 'absolute returns', which are positive returns in any sort of market conditions.

Most, though certainly not all, hedge fund strategies are equity-based involving stock market investment, and hedge funds generally aim to try to secure returns noticeably better than the long-term annual average return from shares (which in most major western countries has tended to be in the 8-10 per cent range). This is another reason wealthy investors find them so attractive.

The strategies adopted by hedge funds to achieve this type of

performance in all market conditions fall into various categories, the most common of which are the following:

– *Long/short equity*, which involves buying shares in some companies in the hope they will go up ('going long'), but shares in other companies in the hope they will fall ('going short'), thereby hedging the bet. Going short usually involves borrowing shares and immediately selling them only to buy them back cheaply later when their price has fallen so that they can be returned to the original lender and the difference kept as profit. Sometimes this type of long/short strategy involves 'pairs trading', such as going long on BP but short on Shell in the belief that the former oil stock is undervalued compared to the latter.

– *Arbitrage*, based on a variety of techniques and strategies used to exploit market pricing inefficiencies (for instance, a company like Shell is quoted on more than one stock exchange and there can be temporary discrepancies in the price quoted in Euros in Holland compared to the price quoted in sterling in London). Fixed income arbitrage funds try to exploit pricing inefficiencies in bond markets and this was the main strategy used by Long-Term Capital Management until its collapse. LTCM took the view, backed up by various mathematical models they had developed, that bond yields tend to converge over time. More often than not this is true, though not always – as they were to find out during the Russian debt and currency crisis of 1998 when traders took flight from Russia, sold risky investments and bought into the relatively safety of US Treasury Bills instead. But LTCM had bought low-priced and high-yielding Russian government securities, while at the same time selling short high-priced and low-yielding US Treasuries, in the expectation that their yields would converge over time. This was because they assumed that investors attracted by high-yielding Russian securities would buy them en masse, push their prices up and so reduce their yields, while selling the relatively unattractive US Treasuries, raising their yields. Charles Geisst pointed out in his excellent *Wall Street: From Its Beginnings to the Fall of Enron* that 'the idea of converging yields evaporated overnight as the Russian obligations fell precipitously in price and the Treasuries gained as a result of the flight to quality. The fund was on the wrong end of both sides of the trade' (p.380), a calamitous end for the Nobel Prize-winning economists.

– *Event-driven strategies*, which can involve buying shares in the expectation that a company merger or

takeover is likely, or which can involve buying into distressed assets (these are avoided by most investors so there is more likelihood of significant mispricing and the opportunity to buy assets at a knock-down price). Often hedge funds will buy the debt of a distressed company as a prelude to taking it over and/or liquidating it for a profit.

– *Macro-strategies*, which are based on taking positions on what is likely to happen in the global economy. George Soros's Quantum Fund has specialised in these macro-strategies, taking huge, credit-fuelled bets on the direction of currencies and commodities, for instance, and in doing so exerting more economic power than many governments can muster.

– *Quant strategies*, which are based on complex mathematical models, and which can involve elements of the other strategies named above as well as short-term trading designed to profit from minute-by-minute and second-by-second price fluctuations.

What all these hedge fund strategies have in common is that they involve speculation to varying degrees as opposed to investment for the long-term, and typically involve significant amounts of leverage too (hedge funds often borrow in multiples of many times their own value as a way of maximizing their returns – for example, returns from arbitrage activities would often be minute if it wasn't for the amount of leverage used). And unsurprisingly, these are two of the main reasons hedge funds are often considered to be risky, if not unstable, influences within the market economy.

Hedge fund structures

In truth, the risk hedge funds present to the operation of the market economy's financial system isn't solely because of what they do, though it is true enough that regulated investment vehicles like unit trusts and investment trusts are legally unable to adopt many of the strategies hedge funds use. The main issue with hedge funds, exposed once and for all by the Madoff scandal, is that they are largely unregulated entities for the secretive and super-rich, and as such are open to all sorts of abuses, attempting to bend the investment 'rules' at will under the guise of innovative practice.

Most hedge funds are restricted to investors – who on investing usually become limited partners – with at least \$1,000,000 (excluding their main residence), i.e. they are for capitalists only. They are also limited

in terms of the number of investors who are allowed to join the fund. This is to avoid the restrictions and regulations placed by governments on other investment vehicles designed for mass participation and has been a way for hedge funds to slip 'under the radar' of the regulators. Most hedge funds – registered offshore for tax reasons and run as private investment partnerships – are covered by little in the way of investor protection and are barred from advertising or being sold to retail investors. Aside from withdrawing their investments (there are often restrictions on this too) hedge fund investors have little practical control over the managers, usually even less so than other collective investment vehicles like investment trusts which have shareholders and an elected board of directors answerable to them and which have to issue transparent annual reports, regular trading updates and so on.

The basic hedge fund structure appears to have changed little since they first appeared in the early 1950s, having been pioneered principally by Alfred Winslow Jones in the US, though many others – such as Warren Buffett before he developed his huge publicly quoted Berkshire Hathaway investment vehicle – established comparable private funds at a similar time. Annual management fees are high, typically 1 or 2 per cent of capital under management, with another 20 per cent of annual returns over and above an agreed threshold, explaining why in recent years many high-flying fund managers working for the big investment banks have been so keen to leave and set up their own hedge funds.

The role of hedge funds

Hedge funds, like private equity, have emerged in the present economic crisis as some of the 'bad guys' of the financial world, almost as if a capitalism without them would somehow be sane and humanitarian. Small investors in retail banks in the UK that have had to be nationalised or merged railed last year against the hedge funds for shorting bank stocks, driving their prices ever lower. It was clear that this would have happened anyway though as was illustrated when the share price slides didn't stop when the shorting of financial shares was prohibited by government order.

There is always a place in capitalism for scapegoats, especially those as rich as most hedge fund managers have been (and as unpleasant as some of them no doubt are). But this detracts from the real issue which is the instability and

chaos that lies at the heart of the money/prices/profits system itself. Capitalism without hedge funds is just as brutish and nasty as capitalism with them – and the irony is that if you accept the rationale of the capitalist economy, hedge funds and other speculators, contrary to much popular opinion, play a useful role.

Capitalism's financial markets are the lubrication for the entire capitalist economy. These markets depend on liquidity and frequent trading to accurately match buyers and sellers at any one moment in time. If trading is thin, this matching of trades becomes difficult if not impossible, whether in shares, bonds, commodities, or more complex financial instruments. If, for example, shareholders investing via the stock market all used a 'buy and hold' strategy and didn't generally sell their shares for long periods after buying them, the equity markets would be stifled and trading difficult. This is why hedge funds and speculators more generally perform a useful role for the system – they are one of the main ways of ensuring sufficient liquidity for it to be able to function properly.

Their growth in size and influence, especially in the last 15-20 years, has been phenomenal, explained by their potential attractiveness to capitalist investors aiming for a steady but above average return, and their attractiveness to fund managers because of their flexibility and fee structures. The number of hedge funds in existence now runs into the thousands, with London's Mayfair being nick-named 'hedge fund alley'. According to the *Financial Times* (31st December), hedge fund assets under management have grown from less than \$50 billion in 1990 to around \$1,900 billion last year, making them a hugely significant economic force.

The current financial turmoil, however, has seen the biggest outflow of assets invested in hedge funds for decades, a sum estimated at \$400-500 billion from January to November 2008. Lack of

credit and high interest rates have meant that a great many hedge funds have had to de-leverage, reducing their debt as quickly as they can and selling their assets at the best prices they can get in falling markets. And as investors withdraw their money on the back of faltering returns, this has had the knock-on effect of hedge funds also having to sell their assets to meet redemptions, creating a vicious downward spiral for equity prices in particular, called 'forced selling'. This was the cause of much (if not most) of the massive waves of selling on world stock markets last September and October, with quite unprecedented levels of market volatility over a sustained period.

Due to this de-leveraging and forced selling at low prices, several hedge funds have already gone bust and there will surely be more to come. In addition, because they were so highly leveraged, the unpredictable volatility in equity, bond and credit markets has ensured that some funds have just folded under the onslaught, including some of the macro and quant funds that should, in theory, have been able to capitalize on these situations.

As hedge funds operate in such a competitive market, those that don't perform get shut down or merged with others (so much so that around 60 per cent of hedge funds are no longer around within five years of their inception). The financial crisis will almost certainly ensure that this figure increases further. Also, there are already indications that hedge funds will be the next target of the regulators and so it would seem that the great hedge fund bonanza is over, at least for now.

As for Mr Madoff, he will have done the cause of hedge funds no good either as their lack of transparency has been illustrated as starkly as it could possibly have been. Many capitalists will no doubt now be looking elsewhere to invest their wealth – so long as another Mr Madoff hasn't made off with it first.

DAP



Have the Tories gone Marxist?

Since the onset of the present crisis, as we have noted, Marx has been mentioned many times in the papers. One of the oddest must be a photo in the *Times* (8 January) of the Tory Leader, David Cameron, with the caption "David Cameron has lined up with Marx and the Church of England".

The photo was used to illustrate an article by the paper's financial guru, Anatole Kaletsky, in which he argued that the way to stop the depression getting deeper was to follow Keynes's advice and encourage people to spend more. But how can David Cameron, the Church of England and Marx be placed in the same boat? Because, says Kaletsky, all three don't think much of the government's policy of trying to spend its way out of the crisis.

True, they don't, but for quite different reasons.

The Church doesn't like people pursuing the acquisition of material things and so is opposed to the government encouraging people to spend more on this. In fact, they probably want us all to consume less.

David Cameron claims to believe that the policy won't work. He wants a different policy to be pursued, but only with him as Prime Minister.

Marxists, like Marx, are not interested in proposing policies for governments to pursue. We say that, whatever the policy they pursue, they cannot make capitalism work in the interest of the majority class of wage and salary workers. We add that, in any event, once a crisis develops, an increase in government and personal spending cannot make it any shorter than it is otherwise going to be.

Crises only come to an end when stocks have been cleared, inefficient businesses eliminated, asset values have depreciated and real wages and interest rates fallen, so restoring the rate of profit, the incentive to produce (and the brake on producing) under capitalism.

Printing more money (or, what amounts to the same thing, the government borrowing money from itself), as an inflation of the currency, is likely to lead simply to rising prices while production continues to stagnate. "Stagflation", as it has been called.

Cameron – of course – does not accept this. He has a different explanation for the crisis: that it was caused by the policies of the Labour government, and so can be ended by a new government pursuing a different policy. This is just the stuff of the game of parliamentary politics, based on the illusion that governments can, and do, control the way the economy works. But they don't.

If Brown is being blamed for causing the crisis it's partly his own fault. When the economy was expanding he was keen to claim the credit. He even made the ridiculous boast that he had ended the boom-slump cycle. Now that things have gone wrong, he's blaming the international economic situation. This is true, but he – and politicians generally – can't have it both ways. They can't claim credit for the good times and blame world events for the bad times. Actually, it's the uncontrollable world economy that's responsible for both.

We hold no brief for Brown, but the Tories's claim that the present crisis is made in Britain, that it's "Gordon Brown's crisis", is not true. It's not the government's fault. It's capitalism's. It's capitalism's crisis, and the answer is not to change the government but to get rid of capitalism.

Child Benefits?

survey was published showing how the (thankfully) rare incidence of child fatality is in fact just the tip of the iceberg. While approximately 1.5 million children are considered possibly at risk of deprivation or abuse, councils have the resources to actively monitor less than 2 percent of these. To find causes then we need to look beyond blaming individuals for the situation.

It may seem simplistic to blame the treatment of Baby P and Karen Matthews' daughter on this social system

harder to bring up happy children if you lack space, or the road outside is noisy and dangerous, or there's no park nearby, or the nearest toddler's group or GP surgery requires a bus ride to access. There is a mountain of evidence that poorer communities generally suffer more from such environmental or "community safety" issues.

Children may well be "innocent", "our future" and other such sentimentalised slogans, but more significantly they are also an immense hindrance to the smooth operation of the system of production for profit. The care and attention children need just doesn't square easily with the time commitment demanded by employment. Despite ever-increasing standards of living (at least if measured by how flat your screen is, or how many different channels you can watch the latest "UK's Worst-Behaved Kids" TV show on), the working week always seems to come in at around 40 hours. This allows

just enough time for sleep, to feed yourself, and otherwise recover before the next shift.

Inadequate childcare provision has been recognised by the government as a reason why some women (usually) give up work to bring up their child full-time. This undoubtedly helps the child's emotional health and happiness. Unfortunately it reduces the productivity of UK plc. This has prompted a range of government measures to try and encourage employers to make the workplace more flexible for parents.

Labour has made much of its 1999 commitment to reduce child poverty. Its probably not too much of an exaggeration to say that this promise (to halve child poverty by 2010) has been the carrot dangled in front of the Labour membership that allowed it to go along with the many downsides of the last 10 years in government. Foremost amongst these of course was the Iraq War (which doesn't appear to have done much for child poverty in that country). But of course it's only UK kids that the government is concerned about. And not even all of them.

The Labour government is clearly significantly less interested in the care of the kids of the unemployed. After all, in their own carefully-constructed phrase, it is only "*hard-working* families" that get their support. The rest can pretty much rot. A few days after the Haringey report findings were published, the government

rather than on the immediate family in each instance. It is a complicated picture for sure, but we

shouldn't ignore the wider picture: the economic hardship of the majority inside capitalism, the atomised and alienated nature of much of our social interaction, and the anti-human values that flourish where profit comes first. We should perhaps not be surprised at the depths to which some stoop as adults when they have grown up in a society that materially and psychologically deprives and abuses humanity.

Certainly it's not just working class children that can suffer emotional abuse from their parents. While the media used these events as an excuse to go to town on the so-called underclass, blaming single mums on benefits for most of the world's problems, it is worth noting one notable extended family which is full of single parents and are significant recipients of state benefits. The family Windsor might look a tad out of place on the sort of estates typified by TV's "*Shameless*", but despite their economic privilege, they are still far from being a good example of healthy emotional functioning.

But no matter how many "good parenting" books you guiltily read, it's

In times of economic insecurity, nothing calms the nerves better than a good moral panic.

The last recession coincided with the media interest in the James Bulger murder, and the British media and sanctimonious politicians have recently found plenty of reasons for moralising, with the investigation into the death of "Baby P" in Haringey and the Karen Matthews prosecution for kidnapping her own daughter.

The Baby P case in particular fuelled many column inches split between sermonising about human nature and trying to find a person to blame: anything but a serious examination of childcare inside capitalism. Within hours of the blame being squarely laid at the convenient door of supposedly incompetent employees of a failing council department, a Home Office

detailed their intention to get single mothers on benefits to sit lie detector tests to get them back to work within 12 months of the birth. This means forcing 12 month-old children into full-time childcare for up to 40 hours per week. The government's own commissioned research indicates the long-term damage – in terms of emotional attachment, security, anger management and ability to form healthy relationships in later life – that childcare (i.e. away from primary care-giver) of over 16 hours per week can do to infants under three years of age. Remember the boast about “joined-up government”?

Government promises are all very well, but it's the economy that usually decides whether a political reform will stick. While Labour has made great play of how much it has prioritised child poverty in its ten years in office, numerous reports in the last few months have shown just how little impact this effort has made, and how structural

poverty is inside capitalism.

One of the main criticisms that world socialists have of attempts to reform the insane system called capitalism, is that gains obtained one year may disappear when the economy dips, and you find yourself back at square one again. That looks to be what is happening as we enter a period of recession. A slump is the market's way of correcting a serious failing – that is, the diminishing levels of profit returning to the owning class. That recalibration must occur inside capitalism, regardless of the damage to be incurred by those dependent on the state, such as children, the unemployed and the poor.

The government's 2010 target will probably then be missed, and by a long shot – the best part of a million children. The government's response? – to boast of another target, a bigger target. This time they promise *full* eradication of child poverty by 2020. An impressive objective perhaps but so what? – if someone tells

you a small lie and you find them out, it's hard to be impressed if they respond by telling you an even bigger lie.

The council workers involved in these recent “Broken Britain” news items, those whose job it is to mop up the human victims of the profit machine, were variously described as “failing”, “incompetent”, “not fit for purpose”. These adjectives should instead be directed at this social system, and at a quite fundamental level. Let's not forget that – as unsympathetic and deluded an individual as she appears to be – Karen Matthews would simply not have kidnapped her daughter if it weren't for her confidence (very well-placed as it turned out) that her unwitting accomplices in the media would be likely to stump up a £50,000 reward to keep the story on their front pages.

BRIAN GARDNER

Conflict

A young relative was recently expounding his reasons for wanting to do well in upcoming examinations. A place at a good university with the aim of high-level entry to the armed forces and training as a helicopter pilot. He wanted to “make a difference” in Afghanistan or Iraq, to “do his bit for his country.” One would hope by the time he was old enough and suitably trained that both of these conflicts would be resolved and invading forces removed from those territories. But if not Iraq or Afghanistan there will be other opportunities waiting, no doubt.

Thirty or so years ago an aged neighbour recounted stories of his involvement in the first world war in France as an underage volunteer. Stories of life, death and the mass maiming of the youth of both sides. He, too, wanted to make a difference when he answered the call and he considered himself one of the lucky ones to return home alive and in one piece. During WW2 his service was in the home guard where they paraded wielding sticks and broom handles with which they vowed to defend the Homeland. In his eighties he was under no illusions as to the lies, half-truths and overstated reasons of the propaganda fed to the nation with the aim of garnering overwhelming support for the plans for wars which would result in the death of millions of soldiers and civilians alike over a huge part of the world. Plans for war which would further the interests of the privileged, which aimed to hang on to and strengthen the Empire's stranglehold on trade routes, colonies and easy access to cheap resources. Plans which would forfeit the lives of ‘ordinary’ men to achieve the material goals of a few.

Injuries in war are multifarious; missing limbs, damaged organs, psychological malfunction. Sophisticated weaponry has added other outcomes to combatants' injuries in contemporary conflict zones; post-traumatic stress disorder which brings a hugely increased chance of suicide, Gulf-War syndrome, exposure to dangerous levels of radiation causing birth defects in offspring sired post-conflict. Prosthetics may fit better now and be more comfortable and cosmetically acceptable than they were almost a century ago but an artificial arm/hand/leg is no substitute for your own. A husband/father/son incapacitated or wheelchair-

bound for the rest of his life was not part of the family planning and death is death; there's no way to put a positive spin on that.

‘Ordinary’ citizens in ordinary situations don't have enemies. We may know people who hold opinions we don't share, we may meet people whom we don't want as friends but personal enemies are rare. Most people have no desire to deliberately kill another human being. Personal disagreements rarely conclude so drastically. Our most dangerous enemies the world over are the insidious, manufactured histories refashioned and spun in favour of the storyteller to keep us onside and supportive of damaging, acquisitive foreign policies and unpopular domestic ones. Part-truths, withheld information and downright lies as opposed to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is the norm and has caused many to become cynical of governments and opinion-makers whilst also becoming distanced from the realities of their own world, sidelined by fake democracies which offer participation in elections two or three times in a decade followed by immediate withdrawal of any chance of actual involvement in real decision making. They are left clinging to the hope of something better coming along with no real conviction that it will.

The old soldier hopes for the end of all wars as promised in “the war to end all wars” and the would-be recruit hopes he can be one of the ones to finally put the world to rights. The one's hopes dashed to his certain knowledge in his lifetime; the other's also doomed, as actual history shows again and again. The experiences of an old man in a long ago war are not that different from those the young are experiencing right now. The technology moves on but the physical and emotional effects on the human beings remain terrifyingly similar. Hindsight is a wonderful thing but, like experience, it seems that humankind is reluctant to utilise, move forward and build on a previous generation's hindsight and experience. Somehow the dialogue has to be widened, to be more inclusive, immediate and truthful, to go beyond hope to a vision of a future reality for young and old alike. A vision of a world without conflict that can be achieved by the world's citizens in general agreement that they are no longer prepared to pay the price that has been demanded of them for so long.

JANET SURMAN



Socialist Party Merchandise

Teeshirts:

Blue with polar bear and 'If you were a polar bear, you'd be a socialist' plus party website address.

Yellow, with blue and green globe 'The world is a treasury for all' plus party web site address on. Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL.

Mugs:

One style: 'Duet' - Red and white with 'Only sheep need leaders' (pictured) and



website, with "Famine? War? Pollution? Capitalism is the Problem. World Socialism s the Solution" and party telephone number.

Pens:

Blue and white, with blue ink 'Only sheep need leaders' and a sheep plus party website. Red and white, with blue ink 'Workers of the world unite' plus party website Black with black ink. 'Only sheep need leaders!' and a sheep plus party website.

Baseball caps:

navy blue, with embroidered "World Socialist Movement" on.

Balloons:

different colours, with "World Socialist Movement".

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Tee shirts £7.00 each (**state size when ordering**). Mugs £5.00 each. Pens £0.50 each. Baseball caps £5.00 each. Balloons 15p each.

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Book Reviews

General Engels

John Green: Engels: a Revolutionary Life. Artery £10.



Engels is often seen as playing very much second fiddle to Marx. But, as John Green points out, he brought to their partnership a greater first-hand familiarity

with working-class life and capitalist production and commerce. While not as readable as Francis Wheen's biography of Marx, this book is still both interesting and informative.

Before reading Green, I had not properly appreciated how much military experience Engels had. In 1848-9 he took part in the 'revolutionary' (in fact democratic and anti-Prussian) uprisings in the Rhineland, seeing action on several occasions. These events led to his long interest in military matters, to his being named as military adviser to the Paris Commune, and to his nickname (among Marx's daughters, for instance) of 'The General'. They also resulted in the Prussian government's naming him as a wanted man, and eventually to his decision in 1850 to work in the Manchester office of the firm part-owned by his father.

From his previous time in England had come his famous work *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Now Engels was forced to work in the company office, though he managed to live a double life, one as a businessman and one as an activist with his companions Mary and Lizzie Burns. While formally an employee, he received a share of the firm's profits (over £1000 in 1859), much of which he forwarded to Marx, and on his death he left the then-tidy sum of £25,000.

Green makes an interesting observation to do with the German word *wissenschaftlich*. This is usually rendered in English as 'scientific', as in 'scientific Socialism', but it can equally well mean 'theory-based', which has fewer connotations than 'scientific'.

This would have been a better book if Green had simply chronicled his subject's life and ideas. Unfortunately, his Leninist sympathies have induced him to include some observations that are

at best superfluous and at worst downright misleading. He starts off badly by comparing Engels to Che Guevara: two good-looking young men from well-off families who supposedly took the side of the oppressed.

Engels' military ideas helped Trotsky, Mao and Che, it's claimed, and the League of Communists, which he joined in 1847, worked on the basis of democratic centralism, which later became a cornerstone of Leninist parties. The Bolshevik concept was in fact far more centralist than democratic, and Green just ignores Marx's and Engels' insistence on workers liberating themselves, a principle rejected by Leninists and all would-be leaders.

So a mixture of a good biography and some dodgy political pleading. **PB**

No socialism

SWP pamphlet. Capitalism's New Crisis: What Do Socialists Say? By Chris Harman. Socialist Workers Party, 2008. £1.50.

The author writes of capitalism "The key question is what is going to replace it...To finally get rid of capitalist crises, in short, you have to get rid of capitalism."

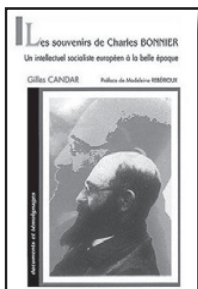
With such promising revolutionary sentiments, you would surely expect some discussion of the socialist future, some mention (however brief) of common ownership, democratic control, production for use not profit. Not a bit of it. Harman offers instead 'A People Before Profit Charter', a ten-point mish-mash of reformist measures such as wage increases, more tax on big companies, less tax on the poor, no to the BNP.

The pamphlet has section headings which include free market failure, slump, boom and crisis, and the debt economy. These concepts sound familiar because they are scattered liberally in the broadsheet dailies, the weekly journals, radio and TV programmes that comment on the problems that "business" and hard-working men and women have to face. This pamphlet has some value in bringing together the various critiques of capitalism and the reforms that are offered to improve the system despite persistent past failures. It has no value at all in promoting revolutionary thought and action to change the system from capitalism to socialism.

SRP

Socialist souvenirs

Les souvenirs de Charles Bonnier.
Un intellectuel socialiste européen
à la belle époque. Ed. Gilles
Candar. Septentrion, Paris.



In a footnote that Engels added to the 4th German edition in 1891 of his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* he mentioned that “a French friend and admirer of

Wagner” did not agree with a remark of Marx’s about the early family. The friend in question was Charles Bonnier, who at the time was a young man in his late 20s (he was born in 1863 and died in 1926).

Bonnier was a member of the French Workers Party and a personal friend of its leading figure, Jules Guesde. Because of his knowledge of German he represented the party at international congresses. He had originally planned to pursue an academic career, in linguistics, in Germany but was barred under Bismarck’s notorious Anti-Socialist Law. Instead, he went to England where he lived from 1890 to 1913, teaching in schools and to students in Oxford and, later, as a professor in French Literature at Liverpool University.

These memoirs (in French) are not all that political but he does have comments on the personalities of the leading lights of the Second International who he met, not just Engels but Wilhelm Liebknecht, Eduard Bernstein and Paul Lafargue. We learn that Eleanor Marx kept a number of black cats and that Engels had a nephew-in-law who was a Tory.

ALB

New Pamphlet

An Inconvenient Question:
Socialism and the Environment



see order form on page 9 for details

Meetings

London

Meetings at Socialist Party Head Office,
52 Clapham High St, SW4 (nearest tube:
Clapham North)

Saturday **14 February** 6pm

Public Debate

IS THE POUND WORTH SAVING?

Yes: Magnus Nielsen (UKIP)

No: Danny Lambert (Socialist Party)

Saturday **28 February** 6pm

THE STORY OF STUFF

Short film followed by talk and discussion

Speaker: Pat Deutz

Chiswick

Branch meeting

Tuesday **17 February**, 8pm

Discussion on the Slaughter in Gaza
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,
Heathfield Terrace W4 (nearest tube:
Chiswick Park)

Manchester

Branch meeting

Monday **23 February**, 8.30 pm

Discussion on ‘What is Poverty?’

Unicorn, Church Street, City centre

continued from page 12
sustaining their life.”

Against Darwinian Marxism

For Marx and Engels, there is no doubt that they saw Darwin’s work as a significant step forward in the understanding of the natural world, especially in its eviction of theological teleology as a form of scientific explanation. But there was no plan to produce some grand Darwinian-Marxist synthesis, using natural selection as a justification for the Marxian analysis of society. Both nature and society were part of natural history. However, this did not mean that society could be reduced to nature. The attempt by German socialists in particular to ground socialism in natural selection was vehemently opposed by both Marx and Engels and by Darwin. Writing to Scherzer on 26 December, 1879, Darwin wrote:

“What foolish idea seems to prevail in Germany on the connection between Socialism and Evolution through Natural Selection.”

In a similar vein, but more sarcastically, Marx wrote to Ludwig Kugelmann on 27 June, 1870:

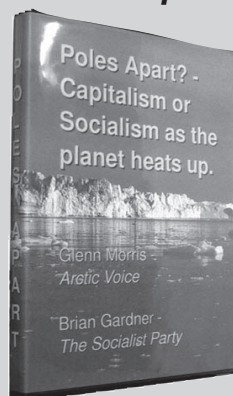
“Mr Lange [a German economist], you see has made a great discovery. All history may be subsumed in one single great natural law. This natural law is the phrase (- the Darwinian expression becomes, in this application, just a phrase -) ‘struggle for life’, and the content of this phrase is the Malthusian law of population, or rather over-population. Thus, instead of analysing this ‘struggle for life’ as it manifests itself historically in various forms of society, all that need be done is to transpose every given struggle into the phrase ‘struggle for life’, and then this phrase into the Malthusian ‘population fantasy’. It must be admitted that this is a very rewarding method - for stilted, mock-scientific, highfaluting ignorance and intellectual laziness.”

Marx is Marx and Darwin is Darwin. There is no Marx-Darwin. At his funeral in 1883, Engels was justified in comparing the importance of Marx with that of Darwin, but in doing so he recognised that their theories covered different terrains. There could be no marriage of Marx and Darwin any more than there could be with Marx and Newton. Many have tried to arrange the Marx-Darwin marriage over the last 150 years, but it always results in unhappiness.

ED BLEWITT

NEW DVD

Poles Apart? Capitalism or Socialism as the planet heats up



with contributions from Glenn Morris, Arctic Voice, and Brian Gardner, The Socialist Party.

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"Class Collaboration in Communist China"



From *The Trade Union Law of the People's Republic of China* it can be seen that the workers of "New China" are unable to organise in genuine Trade Unions; that they are not allowed to call strikes whatever their grievances may be, and that the so-called Trade Union affiliated to the "All-China Federation of Labour" are Unions mainly in name only, similar to Hitler's "Labour Front" in pre-war Germany. China's "Trade Unions" are allowed to negotiate. But that is all. Their main functions, according to Article 9, of *The Trade Union Law of the People's Republic of China*, are to organise the workers to support the laws of the government, carry out the policies of the government; to get the workers to adopt a new atti-

tude towards labour—that is, to observe "labour discipline," to organise "labour emulation campaigns and increase production to ensure the fulfilment of the production plans; to protect public property; to oppose corruption and bureaucracy and to fight "saboteurs" in enterprises operated by the State. In privately-owned enterprises the Trade Unions must help in developing production, "benefiting both labour and capital"—in other words, increasing the exploitation and subjection of the Chinese working-class. The outlook for the masses of China is indeed bleak.

(From article by Peter E. Newell, *Socialist Standard*, February 1959)

Obituary

CHARLIE LAWRENCE

We report with sadness the death of Charlie Lawrence in Australia on 12th January at the age of 89. Charlie was born in England but as a young boy emigrated to Western Australia with his family in the 1920s where they ran a dairy farm. This was part of the Group Settlements project on virgin land. It was hard work but he loved the life there but the depression of the 1930s saw the family in financial trouble and they returned to England.

During the war Charlie worked for a time in 'directed labour' but decided this was not for him after being too close to bombing raids near where he was working. He took this so personally that he decided to go 'on the run', rather than face military service or more directed labour.

It was while he was working at Woking Power Station in 1939 that Charlie met the Socialist Party in the person of a member, George Nuttall, who was the works fitter there. George talked about the party's case for socialism and its analysis of capitalism. Charlie joined the party in 1944 as a member of the old Paddington Branch and attended meetings and lectures. He always recalled the very big meetings held at the old Metropolitan Theatre in the Edgware Road just after the war.

Charlie was the catalyst for no less than six of his siblings becoming socialists - possibly a record in this Party. One of these siblings was Pieter Lawrence (see obituary May 2007 *Socialist Standard*). Charlie returned to live in Australia in the 1960s and although not very active in the WSP of Australia, remained a staunch socialist to the end. Sympathy is extended to his family both in Australia and in the UK.

PHYLLIS HART

Capitalism? Kids' Stuff

'Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff' is a new DVD from The Socialist Party which asks us to take a fresh look at the world we live in and to question some of the most basic assumptions about life in capitalism.

"All I can say is: Oh my god. I just can't believe how good this is!"
BILL HUSTON, BINGHAMPTON INDYMEDIA, NEW YORK

"I've been teaching for 30 years, and I find this to be one of the best short films I have ever used."
DOUG BROWN, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, NORTH ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

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Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Standing out in the crowd

"Doing things sober is no way to get things done"

Only the most demandingly optimistic – or perhaps the most seriously deluded – could have expected anything original to spring from Tony Blair's infamously airy assurance that his governments would be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. In unashamed voter appeal, the process of ascertaining, and then dealing with, the causes of such a massive social problem was made to sound very simple. Except that it ignored the direct co-relation between crime and the poverty which is inescapable in this society of privilege and alienation. There was no need for an expertly number-crunching statistician, or a professor of history, to cast doubt on Blair's assumption that crime could be diminished through brushing up some of the more threatening housing estates, or manipulating the benefits entitlement system to make it even more baffling than before. Blair's dream was that crime could be refashioned from an electoral liability into a vote winner.

But that first part of Blair's promise – to ensure that appropriately punitive measures would be taken to repress crime – has been rather more fertile than the second. So we have had ten years of new laws flooding onto the Statute Book; as the lawyers have thrived thousands of new offences have been created, harsher penalties have been applied by the courts and the prisons have been full to bursting. In the background are the plans for a new generation of titanic prisons – in the building of which the contractors will thrive – to accommodate the predicted rise in demand for cell spaces. The fact that none of these panic-stricken measures has been effective has only served to stimulate more, equally false and doomed, supposed remedies.

Humiliation

The latest of these lays it down that offenders who have been sentenced to a spell of what used to be called Community Service must, while working under that Order, wear brightly visible jackets on the back of which, to distinguish them from men emptying refuse bins or mending telephone lines, the words "Community Payback" – of a minimum size laid down in some official circular – must appear. The idea is that when the offenders are working – scrubbing off graffiti, clearing undergrowth in the park, sorting goods in a charity shop – they will be openly identified as people who have broken the law. This example of what Blair meant by getting tough on crime did not meet with universal approval; there were those, including organisations benefiting from the work, who objected to what they saw as the offenders' public humiliation – as outdated as the stocks and the pillory and excessive, when the work ordered by the Court was punishment enough. Some members of the Labour Party might have wondered about their place in an organisation they had joined on the assumption that it would deal with something as sensitive as crime in a manner which would be, before all else, humane. They could not have expected that their party would be more concerned with gaining the approval of the leader writers of the *Daily Mail*.

Predictably, the government denied any intention other than to re-assure the voters that offenders are being suitably punished.

Justice Minister David Hanson put it: "The public expects to see justice being done and this is what the jackets achieve". He did not dwell on the fact that those who are allocated under Community Payback to work in public places are, except in very rare cases, not guilty of the kind of offences serious enough to make "the public" particularly anxious to witness their punishment. A recent example was the case of 22 young people who were sentenced by an Essex District Judge to periods of between 50 and 90 hours Community Payback. Many of them had impressive academic records and are already voluntarily engaged in community work. Members of the Plane Stupid group, their offence was to disrupt flights out of Stansted Airport by blocking the runway; "I accept," said the Judge "There is an honourable tradition of peaceful protest in this country, and long may it continue. But..."

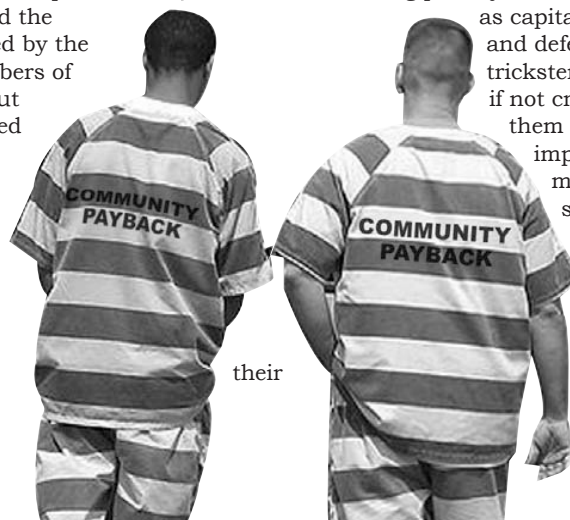
Tsar Of All She Surveys

More to the taste of David Hanson and other Labour ministers is Louise Casey, currently known as the Criminal Justice System Tsar, whose CV includes spells as the Homelessness Tsar, ASBO Tsar and Respect Tsar. Casey responded incandescently, and predictably, to those who expressed reservations about the jackets by alleging that they are "on the side of the criminal rather than the victims". She is something of a controversial figure, remembering herself as a "restless teenager" who longed to leave home. During her time as ASBO Tsar she raised a few ministerial eyebrows by telling an audience of senior civil servants, chief constables and the like "I suppose you can't binge drink any more because lots of people have said you can't do it. I don't know who bloody made that up; it's nonsense...doing things sober is no way to get things done". Warming to her theme about the professional advantages of inebriation, the Respect Tsar suggested that some ministers might perform better if they "turn up in the morning pissed." It says a lot about New Labour's views on the effects of capitalism on its people, that its government employs someone like Casey to pressgang us into official ideas of acceptable behaviour.

Typical of capitalism's many and varied assaults on human well-being, crime is a massive, extremely nasty problem which causes loss, distress and fear to workers who are already under the pressures of survival. But that can also be said about the events and policies which are massively more damaging to human community but are unpunished because they are perfectly legal. Today's examples of this are the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Gaza and the devastating poverty in the recession. Those who,

as capitalism's leaders, organise and defend these outrages are tricksters. It would be consistent, if not crucially constructive, for them to have to parade their impotence, dishonesty and malice by publicly wearing something instantly recognisable. Like a jacket? But it would be difficult to think of wording for it to carry, adequately to express wretched futility.

IVAN





Come Clean, Queenie

"Voice-recognition lie detectors are to be used by two Welsh councils in an attempt to crack down on benefit fraud. People in Flintshire and the Vale of Glamorgan on housing and council tax support will have their speech patterns analysed when claims are reviewed. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is piloting the 12-month scheme in 18 local authorities across Wales and England. However, some critics claim it could deter genuine claimants. Benefits cheats cost the UK taxpayer an estimated £400m a year. A pilot scheme was initially introduced among seven English councils, but has been extended and includes Wales for the first time. Details were announced as part of the Welfare Reform Bill during the Queen's Speech on Wednesday." (BBC News, 4 December) This will be hailed by all supporters of capitalism as an excellent wheeze to foil impoverished claimants, but what will happen when the Queen phones up for an increase on her benefits in the civil list? Presumably the lie detector will be switched off for non-impovertised claimants.



and commit suicide. "Kirk Stephenson, the 47-year-old New Zealand-born chief operating officer at the private equity firm Olivant, died instantly when he was hit by a train at Taplow station in Buckinghamshire, on September 25 last year. A jury returned a verdict of suicide. ...Rene-Thierry Magon de la Villehuchet, 65, a French financier, locked the door of his New York office last month, swallowed sleeping pills and slashed his wrists with a craft knife. ... Paulo Sergio Silva, 36, a trader for the brokerage arm of the Brazilian banking giant Itau, shot himself in the chest during the afternoon trading session in San Paulo's commodities and futures exchange in an apparent suicide attempt in November. ... One of Europe's most influential industry magnates has thrown himself in front of a train after his business empire began to crumble. Adolf Merckle, the 74-year-old head of a conglomerate that employs thousands in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, killed himself on Monday." (Times, 7 January)

Production For Use

We are all used to "letters to the editor" in the national press that deal in crass trivialities, so it was a great pleasure when we came across this exceptionally perceptive letter. "Music as product placement is certainly a dismal vision (The sullyng of our songs, 16 December). But the old business model for music inside capitalism

is nothing to feel nostalgic about. John Harris suggests that downloading makes music worthless. No, just priceless! If everything (not just downloads) was free it all might actually be valued that bit better. I suggest we should embrace the concept of production for use, by raising our horizons beyond just the digital world to - in the words of John Lennon - imagine no possessions. Brian Gardner Glasgow" (Guardian, 19 December)

Desperate Times

With the US automobile industry in recession many desperate ideas are being considered - the Keynesian notion of government intervention - the increase of pensions and welfare payments to stimulate demand, but here is the most extraordinary "solution" of all - prayer! "Pentecostal Bishop Charles H. Ellis III, who shared the sanctuary's wide altar with three gleaming sport utility vehicles, closed his sermon by leading the choir and congregants in a boisterous rendition of the gospel singer Myrna Summers's "We're Gonna Make It" as hundreds of worshipers who work in the automotive industry — union assemblers, executives, car salesmen — gathered six deep around the altar to have their foreheads anointed with consecrated oil. While Congress debated aid to the foundering Detroit automakers Sunday, many here whose future hinges on the decision turned to prayer. Outside the Corpus Christi Catholic Church, a sign beckoned passers-by inside to hear about "God's bailout plan". (New York Times, 7 December) The sad truth is that despite the desperate prayers of Detroit workers capitalism is a system based on slumps and booms and no amount of hymn singing is going to save their jobs.



A Suicidal Society

Workers are often told how lucky they are to be workers instead of capitalists, but capitalists themselves don't believe that piece of nonsense. With the downturn in the capitalist market place many capitalists face the prospect of losing their privileged class position and finding themselves in the ranks of the working class. The prospect is so awful that some of them can't face it

Free Lunch

by Rigg



socialist standard



March 2009
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Capitalism's DNA

PEAK

PROSPERITY

RECOVERY

TROUGH

CONTRACTION

RECESSION

Why the boom/slump cycle is inevitable



Opium wars
page 6



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Slaughter
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 7 March** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
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e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

It's capitalism that's to blame

IN THE space of a few months bankers and the rest of the financial sector have gone from being the self-styled "masters of the universe" to little more than "Scumbag Millionaires" in the words of the tabloids. Even social workers, teachers and imams are getting a better press these days.

On both sides of the Atlantic, bankers are being hounded by journalists and interrogated by politicians in televised show trials. They're having to hand back the private jet and cancel the company team building event at Florida. (Realising it might look bad to take the private jet, Bank of America's CEO slumped it on a train for 8 hours travelling to Washington to give testimony at the Senate hearing). Not all executives take well to the sackcloth and ashes: Eric Daniels, Chief Executive of LloydsTSB, tried to claim his £1 million was a "modest salary".

The blame game is in full swing with politicians, bankers and regulators all trying to place responsibility with someone else. And every so often of course, the working class are dragged into this and accused of starting the problem by daring to imagine that they could lead the lives of the class above them that have been trailed endlessly over the years in the media, so ending up over-stretching themselves to accept all those mortgages and other loans.

The current stand-off between the banks and the government exposes one of the hidden features of the market system. While the government has provided the banks with mind-bogglingly large sums of financial support, they still seem reluctant to lend. (There is even a joke doing the rounds. Apparently Gordon Brown has told the police that they should now turn

a blind eye when they see a bank robbery. The reason? - he's realised that given the current stand-off between the banks and the government, it's probably the quickest way to get some money into circulation).

But of course, while capitalism may be going through interesting times at the moment, that does not mean that the fundamental rules of capitalism are not holding. In fact we are going through such apparent upheavals *in order* to maintain an orderly and even conveyor belt of profit to the capitalist class. Recession is a natural part of the life-cycle of capitalism.

Economists may be confused, and financial modellers may be bamboozled, but capitalism is actually acting true to form. The fundamental requirement is for investment to deliver a return commensurate with the risk. The banks don't see many parts of the economy where they can confidently see a return on their investment, so they are refusing to lend. For the 5 percent of the world's population who don't need to work but instead live off their monopoly and the profit generated by others (or its close relations, rent and - with particular relevance to the banking sector - interest), this may be a period of uncertainty. But it's all in a good cause, ensuring the maintenance of a healthy profit stream into the future.

There will be many innocent by-standers caught in the cross-fire of this latest in the long list of economic crises of the market system, but ultimately it's an issue for the capitalist class. Workers shouldn't waste their time trying to sort out this mess, or to try and better regulate it. Instead its high time we posted notice on an economic system that creates chaos and is, by its nature always in crisis.



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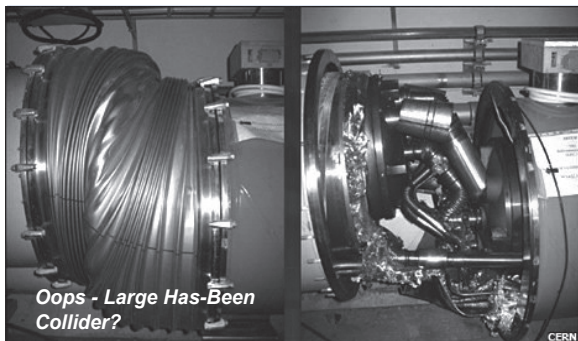
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"We won't be back"

Browsing through the science pages of any newspaper or online journal is to take an entertaining flight of fancy through the world of journalistic prediction. That is not to say, wild stories dreamed up by journalists and fed to a credulous public, but wild stories dreamed up by scientists and fed to a credulous press.

Some of these are just harmless fun, like the evergreen notion of life on other planets, (*Galaxy has billions of Earths*, BBC Online, 15 February). Harmless fun, and like as not hopeless fantasy, based as it is on the formulation known

as the Drake Equation, a well-known exercise in piling unknown suppositions upon each other and arriving at a number. With just over 300 exoplanets now discovered, and all of them gas giants that could kick sand in Jupiter's face, there is no particular reason to predict thousands of intelligent civilisations in our galaxy, but that doesn't stop scientists with one eye on the telescope and the other eye on the tabloids. (Our advice, by the way, if there happen to be any alien civilisations reading this column, is to stay the fuck away from this planet until we've sorted ourselves out, or we're likely to be a very bad neighbour.)



Fancy a round of proton smashing?

You have to feel sorry for the nerds at CERN. Not only were their confident predictions about discovering the fabled Higgs Boson drowned last year in a media frenzy about high-energy particle physics being the death of us all.

When they turned the damn thing on, it broke. And now, months and millions later, they still haven't got it off the starting blocks, and their rivals at the Chicago Fermilab Accelerator are laughing up their labcoat sleeves, predicting that they're going to find the Higgs first (*Race for 'God particle' heats up*, BBC Online, 17 February). It's all getting rather competitive, but then, it's a nice kind of competition, the kind we'd want to encourage in socialism, rival scientific teams racing to the truth. After all, there's no money in the Higgs. It won't change anything. It won't even prove anything, apart from showing that the standard model of physics still holds up. If the nerds at Fermilab pull it off, CERN will be red-faced, but science will benefit either way. There is such a thing as healthy competition. The mistake of capitalism is to apply it where it does damage. Socialism would cooperate over what mattered, like world production and distribution, and keep the competition for the fun things, like football and particle physics.

Ray Kurzweil is another respectable scientist with a penchant for grandstanding, and his prediction that humanity is approaching a technological singularity figures prominently on his site *Kurzweil.net* and is regularly dredged up by newshounds on a sensation-hunt. A singularity is a point beyond which it is not possible to make any prediction whatsoever, and according to him, this event horizon will be reached when artificial intelligence overtakes human intelligence, perhaps 30 years from now.

Since human intelligence has got us where we are today, some might see this as a pretty good thing. However one can't really blame hacks like Ed Howker of *The Independent* (4 February) for instinctively conjuring up images of Skynet, Cyberdyne Systems, and all the rest of the paraphernalia of the box-office hit *Terminator*. After all, the work is being developed today and as the director of Michigan's AI laboratory frankly admits "Our noses are too firmly pressed into our work for us to ask, to really ask, should we be doing what we're doing?"

One only has to watch state-of-the-art robots whizzing round the lab floor trying not to bang into things to realise that the Terminator isn't going to kick our front door in just yet. The concept of inorganic evolution – your toaster will inherit the earth – is a pretty old and abused notion. It's not that we could never build something which could destroy us. After all, look at the weapons industry, or even the car industry. It's just that, when it comes to Terminating ourselves, we don't need artificial intelligence to do it for us. We've got capitalism. That's all the prediction you'll ever need.

HOW WASPS GOT THEIR STING

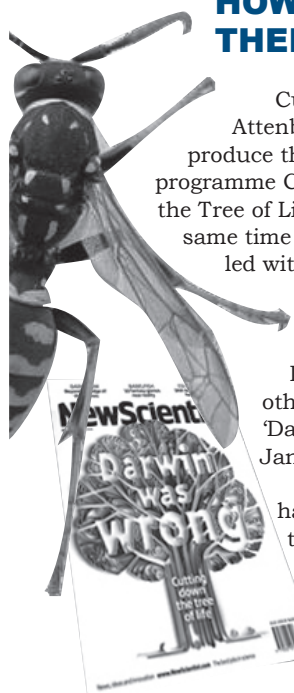
Curious that David Attenborough should produce the recent BBC programme *Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life*, just around the same time that *New Scientist* led with a cover-story specifically refuting the notion of a Tree, and to the rage of Dawkins, Dennett and others, proclaiming that 'Darwin Was Wrong' (24 January).

Work in genomics has revolutionised the understanding of evolution, and classical definitions of 'species' and

'inheritance' are coming under new scrutiny. Up to fifty percent of genes, it is estimated, are not passed along any linear tree of descent at all. They pass horizontally between related and sometimes unrelated hosts, usually in the form of a virus. Horizontal gene transfer (HGT) is now thought to account not only for some of the most bizarre biological hybrids, but also for such commonplaces as a wasp's toxic sting. This constant 'viral rain' may also account for anything up to ninety percent of the human genome and some of our most basic biological functions, such as placental development, immune-response and gene expression (*New Scientist*, 28 August 2008). Thus some evolutionary biologists now think the idea of a family 'tree' is obsolete. If there are any structures that look like a tree, they are local outgrowths

of a general evolutionary 'web'. But does that make Darwin wrong? Maybe, maybe not. *New Scientist*, with an apparently airy disregard for the slaving orcs of the Discovery Institute over in creationist Mordor, has gone for the controversial sell.

"You have made a lot of extra, unpleasant work for the scientists whose work you should be explaining to the general public", fumes Dawkins et al (*New Scientist Letters*, 21 February), concerned that this 'goof' gives the god squad useful ammunition. Let's not use the creationists as an excuse to make programmes so science-lite that they misrepresent the state of knowledge. If we, the general public, can cope with hierarchical trees, we can surely cope with HGT and webs. Socialists never had much use for hierarchies anyway.



Trade unions

Dear Editors

With reference to the *Socialist Standard* (50 Years Ago, February) referring to February 1959 showing Trades Unions in Maoist China were in practice organs of the State, Trotskyists in the SWP and other Trotskyists argue for unions to have power and rights. Yet when Trotsky was Lenin's right-hand man he argued for the banning of unions to represent workers' interests on the grounds it was not necessary in a workers state: instead they should express the state's viewpoint to workers. He advocated forced labour and military discipline to be attached to labour units. Hitler and Mussolini had similar ideas.

Please assure that even under socialism and communism you would recognise free powerful Trades Unions to advance workers' and other people's rights as a Fundamental Human Right.

ANDREW HARVEY, Carlisle.

Reply: We can't give you the assurance you ask for since trade unions, as organisations to negotiate with employers over the price and conditions of use of the commodity labour-power that their members are obliged to sell to get a living, will not exist in socialism. Neither will employers, nor wages. Instead,

production will be under democratic control on the basis of the common ownership of the means of production. No doubt there will be workplace bodies – which will be free and powerful – to ensure this democratic control but these will not be trade unions.

We hope you don't think we're Trotskyists. We are not but have always opposed Leninism and its 57 varieties including Trotskyism. We agree with you in denouncing Trotsky's attitude towards trade unions when he was a member of the state-capitalist Bolshevik government of Russia in the early 1920s – *Editors*.

Kropotkin

Dear Editors

I much appreciated DP's review of my Kropotkin pamphlet (January *Socialist Standard*). Of course Kropotkin, like myself, was clearly able to distinguish between Marx's advocacy of parliamentary government (State socialism) and Lenin's vanguardist approach.

What is important to recognise, however, lost on DP, is that Kropotkin and the anarchists repudiated both Marxist politics and Bolshevism and other anarchists (libertarian socialists) opposed Marxist State socialism – clearly spelled out in Iain McKay's recent *An Anarchist FAQ* (AK Press, 2008) and other pamphlets by the Anarchist Federation.

BRIAN MORRIS, Lewes, Sussex,

Reply: We would argue that Marx was not an advocate of "parliamentary government" but of the abolition of the state. As he wrote in *The German Ideology* "[The proletarians] find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression, that is, the State. In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State". It is unfortunate that after so-called "Marxism" became the official ideology of the ruling class in Russia his anti-state sentiments have been downplayed or distorted. "State socialism" is a contradiction in terms and was never used by Marx.

In all essentials, we would say the theories of Kropotkin are closer to those of Marx than are some others from the Anarchist tradition; the difference is one of *means* and not *ends* – a classless, stateless, moneyless, wageless common ownership society. However what it is more important, as we hope you'll agree, is not what Marx or Kropotkin said or meant to say, but how we can improve our current theoretical understanding by studying their works and criticising them in the light of later developments and our experience of the present. – *Editors*.

The real dirty work Socialism will eliminate capitalism's dirty work

'WHO WILL do the dirty work?' is a question that socialists often hear, whether from inveterate opponents or those who have just come across the socialist case. The questioner usually has in mind jobs such as collecting the bins, sweeping the streets or working in the sewers. The reason why people ask about this kind of work is that it is clearly useful, indeed essential: without collection of rubbish, for instance, towns and villages would soon disappear under a pile of filth and rats.

The standard answer to the 'dirty work' question is to say that a socialist society would try to automate such work, or make it less unpleasant, or organise a rota or call for volunteers. Since there will be no employment or jobs in socialism, certainly nobody will be condemned to do such work forty hours a week for years on end. Charles Fourier once suggested that children, who love dirt, should be the ones to do the dirty work. That will probably not be acceptable as a solution, but it at least illustrates one of the possibilities.

However, there is another way of approaching the question: to ask what work truly counts as dirty. For cleaning

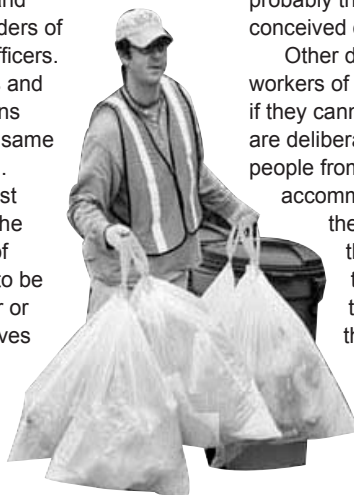
toilets and removing industrial waste may not be very nice, but there is other work which is dirty in the very real sense of being anti-human, concerned with damaging people rather than helping and benefiting them. This is work which will not be needed in socialism, where all human activity will take place to satisfy people's needs.

The armed forces, for instance, exist to defend the interests of the ruling class of whichever country they serve. To do this, their members must be prepared to kill, injure, maim and torture, under the orders of their commanding officers. Spies, secret agents and government assassins have essentially the same professional mission. And soldiers don't just kill: they also die in the interests of a class of parasites. Learning to be a good soldier, sailor or airman/woman involves unquestioning acceptance of

orders and soul-destroying drills intended to inculcate discipline and obedience. The humanity of soldiers and their victims are both dismembered by war and the training that prepares for war.

Those who work in arms factories, designing and building the weapons that soldiers use are doing another kind of dirty work. Making guns, bullets, missiles and bombs means making ways of killing and maiming other human beings. Socialist society will know no wars or armed forces, so using and making these weapons – probably the dirtiest work that can be conceived of – will simply not take place.

Other dirty work involves depriving workers of their homes, cars or whatever if they cannot pay for them. Bailiffs are deliberately concerned to prevent people from meeting their needs for accommodation and so on, including the most basic needs of all. Sadly, the poverty that drives workers to labour for a wage can lead them to take jobs that cause them to act in a thoroughly nasty and inhuman way to their fellow workers.



continued page 12
5



Opium wars, old and new

The phrase “opium wars” usually refers to the British military assaults of 1839–42 and 1856–60 that forced the Chinese emperor to allow British merchants to sell his subjects opium. The opium was grown in India, where the tax revenue from its sale maintained the colonial administration.

In 1839, imperial commissioner Lin Zexu wrote to Queen Victoria: “By what right do the barbarians use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? Although they may not intend to do us harm, in coveting profit to an extreme they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience?”

He never received an answer.

Poisoning “their own people”

Not only the Chinese suffered at the hands of the profit-coveting barbarians, who derived equal satisfaction from poisoning “their own people.” Britain imported 200,000 pounds of opium from India in 1840. It was consumed, quite legally, mostly mixed with alcohol in a flavoured concoction called laudanum, as an all-purpose painkiller, tranquilliser and sleeping potion. Society ladies used it to acquire the then-fashionable pallid complexion associated with tuberculosis, while the neglected and undernourished babies of the working class were dosed with it to keep them quiet while their mothers toiled long hours in the mills.

Nowadays trading in opium is illegal. That, of course, does not prevent its large-scale production, sale and consumption, mostly as heroin. It merely raises prices and makes the business even more lucrative, though some “drug lords” perhaps envy the respectability enjoyed by their Victorian predecessors – and by pushers of currently legal poisons.

Opium and Afghanistan

At present the global centre of opium production is Afghanistan (accounting for 93 percent of opiates sold worldwide in 2007). To be more precise, production is concentrated in three border zones of Afghanistan: in the northeast, supplying the post-Soviet region through Tajikistan; in the west, for export through Iran; and above all in the south, for export through Pakistan. Sales within the country have also grown rapidly.

Afghanistan’s annual earnings from opium exports are estimated at \$4 billion. This is some 15 times larger than earnings from all legal exports combined (nuts, wool, cotton, carpets, etc.). Thus opium has greater dominance over the Afghan economy than oil, for instance, has over the economies of most oil-exporting states. The farmers who grow the poppies get about a quarter of the money, \$1 billion. The rest goes to traffickers and to the politicians, officials and military commanders who control the territory and protect the traffic (where they do not organize it directly).

As we know, Afghanistan and adjoining areas of northwest Pakistan are at war. This is Obama’s favourite war, so we can expect it to intensify. On one side: the

US and NATO, their client regime under President Hamid Karzai in Kabul, their allies in Pakistan’s governing elite. On the other side: the Taliban and their Islamist allies in Pakistan. In between, fluctuating in their allegiance (depending on who pays more): the local bosses or “warlords.”

What is the relationship between the war and the opium trade?

First of all, the predominance of opium in the Afghan economy is largely a product of prolonged warfare. The many years of war disrupted long-established patterns of food production and distribution. Unlike food crops, poppies do not require much tending and so are better suited to unpredictable and chaotic conditions.

A new opium war

All players, except possibly the US and NATO, are closely involved in the opium trade. This applies equally to the Taliban, the warlords, and the regimes in Kabul and Islamabad. One of the biggest traffickers, for example, is Karzai’s brother. All, to varying degrees, are financially dependent on opium. Pakistan receives US aid and has other sources of revenue, but it too depends on opium money: the trucks that carry supplies over the border for NATO forces in Afghanistan return loaded with opium.

Thus to a large extent opium funds the war. It pays for weapons and hires fighters. And, in turn, the fighting is not only for control over territory, but also and especially for the control over opium production and exports that goes with territorial control. As in Congo, war is simultaneously a means and an end in the struggle to control a valuable resource – metallic ores in Congo, opium in Afghanistan. If Congo is a “mobile war”, then Afghanistan, to some extent at least, is a new opium war.

Opium and the US role

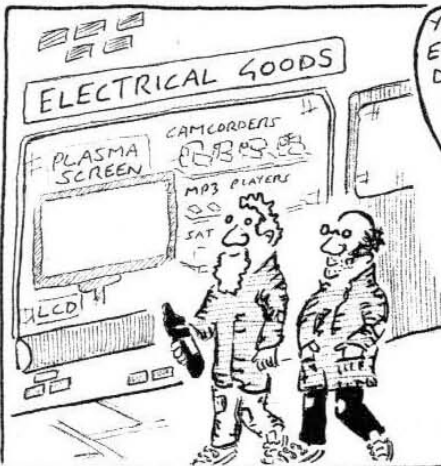
The role of opium in US policy regarding Afghanistan is more difficult to assess. The illegal status of the trade prevents opium interests from exerting open influence on the US government, although secret influence – through links between politicians, officials and illegal business (“organized crime”) – may be significant. However, the US market in illegal drugs is supplied primarily from other parts of the Americas, not from Afghanistan.

Officially, the US government conducts a “counternarcotics strategy” in Afghanistan. Farmers have been offered assistance in switching from poppies to wheat. In practice, even if the intentions behind such programs are genuine and even if they were to be adequately financed, the conditions of war and the reliance of US allies on opium money would still militate against their success. It may be worth noting that the CIA, which has traditionally been quite willing to cooperate with foreign drug interests (for so long as they served its purposes) and even sell drugs itself to raise additional funds, plays no part in anti-opium measures.

STEFAN



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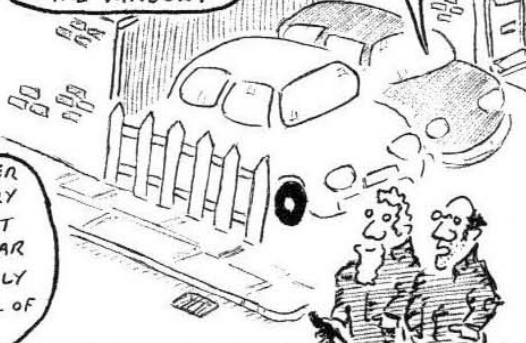
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PEOPLE HAVE COME TO EXPECT THIS LIFESTYLE THOUGH. THE TWO CARS PARKED ON THE DRIVE, THE FOREIGN HOLIDAYS, THE BIG 'STOP HEATHROW EXPANSION' POSTER IN THE WINDOW.



THINK OF THE TWO NEW POWER STATIONS COMMISSIONED EVERY WEEK IN CHINA. AND THE FACT THAT THE NEXT BIG GLOBAL WAR IS LIKELY TO BE AN UNSEEMLY STRUGGLE TO SECURE CONTROL OF THE WORLD'S INCREASINGLY SCARCE RESOURCES.

AND ALL THIS NEW LABOUR GOVERNMENT CAN THINK OF (BLESS THEIR TOTAL INABILITY TO THINK OUTSIDE THE FREE MARKET BOX) IS TO THROW MORE MONEY AT THE BANKS SO WE START BORROWING AGAIN, START SPENDING! THAT'S THE BASIS OF THE MODERN BRITISH ECONOMY..



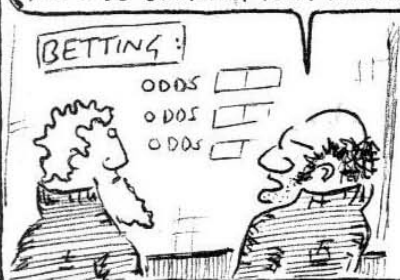
I GUESS KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES IS THE ONLY KIND OF RELIGION WE HAVE NOWADAYS. BUT, WE CAN CONSOLE OURSELVES WITH ALCOHOL, DRUGS, OR... ..GAMBLING!



... WE TAKE ON CREDIT THAT CRIPPLES US, SO WE CAN SPEND MONEY ON THINGS WE DON'T REALLY NEED, OR WANT. IT'S LIKE A KIND OF NEUROSIS, REALLY. 'RETAIL THERAPY' - DOES IT MAKE YOU ANY HAPPIER?



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...SHAME SOME FOLKS TAKE LOSING SO BAD!

COME TO THAT, ISN'T PLAYING THE STOCK MARKET JUST RESPECTABLE GAMBLING, TOO?



Pieces together

GROWING OLD DISGRACEFULLY

"Miriam Gorman (below) wanted to retire more than a year ago, but steep financial losses in her retirement savings mean the 71-year-old bookkeeper now plans to work on indefinitely. 'I would have preferred to retire at the end of 2007, and then I was thinking at the end of this year, and now maybe it's next year. I really don't know,' said Gorman, who's been with an advertising company in Bethesda, Maryland, for 15 years. Across America, older workers are postponing retirement plans, dismayed by huge losses in the value of the investments they had depended on to fund their retirement. The U.S. recession has compounded the problem, with home values too low to provide the nest egg many seniors need and interest rates on safer assets close to zero." (*Yahoo News*, 17 January)



OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

"From the steam grates of Pennsylvania Avenue to the porticoes of the city's grand buildings, homeless Washingtonians who live inside the nation's tightest security zone are being encouraged to decamp during the inauguration for shelters in the city's outer neighborhoods. The security sweeps will probably begin Monday. Buses will make one-way trips to two of the District's largest shelters, which will remain open round-the-clock, said D.C. Council member Tommy Wells (D-Ward 6). "Everyone has to be out of the perimeter by then," Wells said." (*Washington Post*, 15 January)

MORTGAGE MISERY

"One house was repossessed every ten minutes in the third quarter of last year as the rate of seizures almost doubled, the Financial Services Authority said yesterday. The City regulator said that 13,616 homes were repossessed in the three months to September last year, a 92 per cent rise on the third quarter of 2007. There was also a rise in the number of homeowners in arrears, indicating that hundreds of thousands of borrowers could lose their homes. The FSA said that 340,000 borrowers were behind on mortgage repayments, a 10 per cent rise compared with the previous quarter of last year and a 24 per cent rise on the same period in 2007." (*Times*, 23 January)

HARD TIMES

"Think pawnshops, and you probably conjure up old jewelry, desperate customers, and seedy storefronts. Hardly, it would seem, the ingredients for innovation. Yet amid recession, the country's largest chain, Cash America International (NYSE:CSH - News),



is using the credit-crunch boom time to lure new customers and expand. To woo the growing number of consumers facing a credit squeeze, Cash America is boosting the amount of short-term loans it offers online, and is adding a cash-advance feature to electronic payroll cards. Such cards are gaining popularity among employees with poor credit, or those without traditional bank accounts." (*Yahoo News*, 5 February)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 26th. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail: 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

NORTHWEST

Lancaster branch. Meets every Monday 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380

Manchester branch. Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. Tel: 0161 860 7189

Bolton. Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589

Cumbria. Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG

Carlisle. Robert Whitfield. E-mail: rewcb13@yahoo.co.uk tel: 07906 373975

Rochdale. Tel: R. Chadwick. 01706 522365

Southeast Manchester. Enquiries: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH

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Skipton. R. Cooper, 1 Caxton Garth, Threshfield, Skipton BD23 5EZ. Tel: 01756 752621

Todmorden. Keith Scholey, 1 Leeview Ct, Windsor Rd, OL14 5LJ. Tel: 01706 814 149

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

South West branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

EAST ANGLIA

East Anglia branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

Cambridge. Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

NORTHERN IRELAND

Newtownabbey. Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

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cooking the books

Thieves fall out

When we talk about the capitalist class of a particular country, we sometimes refer to them as "they". But this can give the impression that they are a monolithic bloc with the same interest. Of course they all share a common interest in maintaining capitalist property rights and the general conditions for capitalist production, such as a working class dependent on working for them to obtain the money to buy things. Beyond that, however, the interests of the different sections diverge.

"American exporters in last-ditch attempt to stop Obama raising the trade barriers" read a headline in the *Times* (26 January):

"A coalition of leading American exporters, including Boeing, Caterpillar and General Electric, is trying to stop a 'Buy America' clause being included in President Obama's \$825 billion stimulus package. The American Steel First Act would ensure that only US-made steel was used in \$64 billion of federally funded infrastructure projects. The money, earmarked for roads, bridges and waterways, is aimed at kickstarting the economy, but the initiative by steelmakers, which secured support last week in the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee, is opposed by American exporters, who fear retaliation by foreign governments."

This represents a clash of interests between capitalists producing for the home market such as, in the US, those with investments in steel production, and those producing for outside markets. The former favour protection, the latter free trade. At the moment the governments of most countries favour free trade as they are haunted by their perception of what happened in the 1930s.

Then, governments put up tariff barriers against each other's goods, thereby further reducing world trade and so exacerbating the depression. These "trade wars" can even be seen as a precursor of the real war that broke out in 1939 when the countries that lost out in them, Germany in particular, decided that war was the only way to solve their problem of access to key raw materials and outside markets.

It remains to be seen whether governments will be able to resist pressure for protectionism from capitalist corporations producing for the home market, often backed by the unions organising their workers (Obama did get the proposal watered down). The *Daily Mirror* is running (yet another) "Buy British" campaign while construction site workers took up the populist slogan Gordon Brown raised at the 2007 TUC Conference of "British Jobs for British Workers". Dismayed (as he knows very well that as a mainly exporting country most British capitalist firms would lose out if protectionism catches on), Brown tried to back-peddle on his demagoguery, and the BNP was delighted to be able to reclaim the slogan he had stolen from them.

Another division within the capitalist class is between those with investments in actual production and those engaged in various financial dealings. To judge by one incident at the annual Davos meeting of the world's top capitalists and politicians, these two sections have fallen out big time, with one industrialist calling for some bankers to be jailed:

"John Neill, chief executive of Unipart, was given one of the day's biggest rounds of applause when he declared that bankers who were involved in developing toxic products that caused massive damage to the global economy should be punished. If you knowingly make other kinds of toxic products, you go to jail. Why should bankers be different, he asked" (*Times*, 29 January).

Socialists look on at these arguments from outside as hostile observers. We don't take sides. We don't support either protection or free trade and we don't oppose just the banking section of the capitalist class. In the words of William Shakespeare, we say: "A plague on both your houses".

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Is capitalism crumbling?

Leftwingers are calling for the nationalisation of the banks. They may get their way. And then?

The severe economic crisis has dominated newspaper headlines – day after day for at least the past six months – like no other story in recent history. The massive layoffs, losses and bankruptcies have grown as familiar as the daily death-count in Iraq and Afghanistan. The ranks of the unemployed are overflowing and no job seems secure.

Not only is the situation spinning out of control, but workers are being reminded how little control they have over their lives. Their own futures are in the hands of business leaders

and politicians, who themselves can do nothing more than follow the inhuman impulses of capital.

One bright spot, however, is the market for solution-peddlers and doom-prophesiers, which is booming. On the one hand, there are the experts claiming to know the secret for getting capitalism back on its feet and curing the system of its manic-depressive tendencies; while on the other hand, there is the minority that views the crisis as the beginning of the final collapse of capitalism.

The pages of this magazine, in contrast to that commotion, might

seem calm, or even complacent. As in the quieter days before the crisis, we continue to advocate socialism in much the same tone and with the same arguments. Some readers might be wondering how this crisis affects socialists and how we are responding to it. How do we differ from those offering to solve the crisis or from those who say we are witnessing the end of capitalism?

Reformist solutions

As workers, socialists do not necessarily relish an economic crisis, as we face unemployment

or wage cuts like everyone else. Being a socialist does not equip a person with a protective force-field to block the harmful consequences of capitalism. There's no question that the working class, including socialists, will suffer the most from this crisis.

It is in this atmosphere of anxiety that reformists of all kinds step up to offer sure-fire ways to relieve capitalism of its hangover and keep it sober forever more. Most on the Left remain confident that greater intervention and regulation on the part of the state will pretty much do the trick, pointing to how well it apparently worked back in the 1930s. That is certainly debatable, but these ideas will probably be tested by reality soon enough. Even if such measures are more or less effective, the crisis still may drag on for several years – although no one is really in a position to make clear predictions.

The clear aim of reformists is to get capitalism back on its feet again, yet many on the Left like to spice up their own Keynesian reformism with revolutionary rhetoric. They are able to get away with this thanks to the widespread misconception that any involvement by the state in the economy is “socialistic.”

The more imaginative reformists have viewed bank nationalization, for instance, as an integral part of measures to both overcome the crisis and put in place a new system of socialist production – rather than being a temporary measure to prop up the crumbling financial system. Their brand of “socialism” may be very attractive as it offers something for everyone, but they are in fact peddling a sort of state capitalism under a false label.

Take the Socialist Equality Party in the US, for instance, which back in September, at the time of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, confidently issued the following demand as part of a “socialist program”:

“The entire financial system must be taken out of private hands and nationalized in the form of a public utility under the democratic control of the working class, with provisions taken to safeguard the holdings of small depositors and share-holders. It must be subordinated to the social needs of the people and dedicated to developing and expanding the productive forces in order to eliminate poverty and unemployment and vastly improve the living standards and cultural level of the

entire population.” (“The Wall Street Crisis and the Failure of American Capitalism”)

The author, Barry Grey, presents this demand as one part of a “socialist program that places the needs of the people before the profits and personal fortunes of the ruling elite,” necessary because “there is no solution within the framework of the profit system” to the “crisis of the American economic and political system.” So we can only suppose his nationalized financial system is operating in a “socialist” society (or a society that follows a “socialist program”).

But with socialism like this, who needs capitalism! There will still be a financial system, so one would have to assume that goods

“There are those who see the collapse as a return to a pre-industrial life, and advise people to head to the hills after stocking up on gold, guns and vegetable seeds”

are paid for with money and thus produced for the market. There would be no need for any of that in a society where things are produced to *directly* meet people's needs, as democratically determined by them. It may sound nice to say that the financial system will take the “form of a public utility under the democratic control of the working class” and be “subordinated to the social needs of the people”, but what would that mean in practice? (Even that “socialist program” sounds a bit dodgy, with its promise to “place the needs of the people before the profits and personal fortunes of the ruling elite,” as it naturally assumes the continued existence of a wealthy ruling elite.)

Perhaps we should compliment the Socialist Equality Party for being “ahead of the curve” on this nationalization issue, as any good “vanguard party” should be, now that many capitalist governments are thinking about implementing that measure. And we might compliment them further if bank nationalization

succeeds in stabilizing the financial system. But this organization and so many like it deserve our contempt for dressing up reformist measures to look revolutionary. Their sweet-sounding promises only block the path to revolution by utterly distorting the meaning of socialism.

A collapsing theory

On the other extreme from the reformists, or at least it would seem, are those who argue the final collapse of capitalism has begun and that efforts to prop up the system are doomed to fail.

The reasons given for this inevitable collapse vary quite a bit, however. Some argue, as many Marxists did back in the 1930s, that it is the result of capitalism's internal contradictions, such as the tendency towards a declining rate of profit. But many more, including the adherents of peak oil theory, view the collapse as the result of capitalism colliding with some outside force that prevents the further accumulation and expansion that is the lifeblood of the system.

Not only are there a myriad of reasons offered to explain the inevitable collapse, but there are starkly different conclusions reached about what will replace capitalism. There are those who see the collapse as radicalising the population and bringing workers around to a revolutionary standpoint; while others depict a prolonged period of social anarchy or even a return to a pre-industrial life, and advise people to head to the hills after stocking up on gold, guns and vegetable seeds.

Regardless of those particular differences, however, the idea of an inevitable collapse of capitalism clearly implies that a great historical change could take place regardless of our actions. Instead of socialism replacing capitalism, based on the conscious decisions and actions of workers, we would have capitalism ending at some point, and that collapse then stimulating a great social change – for better or worse.

One might wonder, though, what sort of society would exist in the interim, however brief it might be, between the collapse of the old and the emergence of the new. It would be “non-capitalist,” one would assume, but what would be the dividing line between the two? Is it possible for a society to *not* be capitalist, but still not be anything else either?

The reason for much of the confusion among the

“catastrophists,” as they are sometimes called, is that – just like the reformists who confuse nationalization with socialism – they do not have a clear understanding of what capitalism is, exactly. That is to say, instead of understanding capitalism on the most essential level, as a system of commodity production in the pursuit of profit, they get caught up in the various forms of capitalism, and imagine that some are more capitalistic than others.

It is certainly true that forms of capitalism or particular governments can collapse, but this should not be viewed as the collapse of capitalism itself. There are many examples of collapses to choose from, most notably the fall of the Weimer government in Germany that was followed by a fascist regime. For over a decade, Germany went through economic crisis, political upheaval, and a catastrophic war. With no exaggeration, one can speak of that period as a collapse of civilization. Yet throughout it all the capitalist system remained intact.

It is easier to speak of the “collapse of capitalism” if a person has no clear idea of what capitalism means. And if its meaning is unclear, then the understanding of socialism will also be a muddle (just like those reformists who mistake state capitalism for socialism). It is important, therefore, to distinguish between an economic or political collapse, and the *end* of capitalism itself, which only workers can bring about by replacing it with socialism.

Optimism in depression

The criticism of those two tendencies might lead some to believe that we offer no solution to the crisis, or that we ignore the objective factors of reality and overemphasize the subjective ones.

We do in fact have a solution to this crisis and to economic crisis in general. But our approach to the problem is similar to how we approach other problems, such as the destruction of the environment or war, in that we do not propose a separate solution for each problem. This isn’t because we are indifferent to the problems, but because we recognize the relation between individual problems and the capitalist system.

In a sense, to solve one problem requires the solution of all of them. The fundamental solution to the problem of crisis, for instance, requires the introduction of a

new system of production and consumption no longer mediated by the market, where there would no longer be any basis for crises. In other words, socialism is the solution to this particular crisis and the problem of crisis itself, along with every other social problem that is *specific* to capitalism.

As for objective versus subjective elements, we would certainly recognize that the objective reality of the crisis will have an impact on how people view capitalism. This new situation may create a more favourable environment for explaining socialism.

Already, in the past six months, there has been a tremendous shift in “public opinion”, so that now it is almost fashionable to rebuke bankers for their greed and ignorance. There is no question that more people than ever are wondering whether capitalism is indeed the best of all possible worlds.

Of course, even while the changing reality has stimulated thought and debate, the conclusions people are reaching vary. Many see the crisis as the bankruptcy of “neoliberalism”, rather than capitalism itself, while the religious minded might even say it is punishment from God. No matter how much the objective reality may influence ideas and test theories, it will not directly deposit the concept of socialism in a person’s mind.

So we still have the task of explaining socialism, and it is more important than ever as workers suffer under the crisis. That explanation, as always, is based on the recognition of the fundamental contradictions and limitations of capitalism, and the realization that this (obsolete) system cannot be reformed beyond a certain point. It is during a crisis that those contradictions and limitations are most evident. Marx describes how the “contradictions and antagonisms of bourgeois production are strikingly revealed” during a crisis of the world market, which is a moment when there is a “real concentration and forcible adjustment” of those contradictions (*Theories of Surplus Value*).

With the problems so plain to see, and the limitations of capitalism so palpable, the explanation of socialism as the solution may very well begin to seem more concrete and practical – and urgent – than before.

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE

from page 5

Many would no doubt include employment in slaughterhouses as another example of dirty work: killing animals, often in appallingly unhygienic conditions, so that people can eat meat. Much other employment is numbingly routine, repetitive and boring, perhaps taking minutes to learn and yet forming the basis for a lifetime of labour. This is anti-human too: it reduces people to mere appendages of a machine (whether lathe or computer) and robs them of their freedom and creativity. Human work should if possible be interesting, varied and fulfilling, and such routine work is none of these. William Morris wrote an essay with the significant title ‘Useful work versus useless toil’, and boring unhuman labour is definitely toil.

We have not even mentioned work that is part and parcel of the money system, from banking to insurance, from shops to accountancy. This cannot be compared to killing in the armed forces, but it is not about meeting human need, not about producing useful goods and services (food, homes, clothes, health care, transport, leisure activities). It is essentially useless work rather than intrinsically anti-human (though of course it can be just as boring as anything mentioned in the previous paragraph). Work which produces genuinely useful things is bound to be more satisfying than work which is pointless or just produces luxuries for the idle rich.

It should also be emphasised that, in describing some work as dirty and anti-human, we are not attacking those workers who are forced to do these jobs. They are exploited like all other workers, and their interests lie equally in ending capitalism and establishing socialism. No member of the Socialist Party is allowed to join the armed forces, since we are not prepared to kill and be killed for ‘queen and country’, but we do not regard soldiers, bailiffs and so on as enemies of the working class.

So if sceptics ask you about dirty work in socialism, get them to reflect on what really counts as dirty work. Under capitalism, much work is not just useless and wasted but actually designed to be anti-human and to kill and damage people. This is the true dirty work, just the kind of degrading labour that will not be necessary in a socialist society.

PAUL BENNETT

Socialist Standard

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Helicopter Ben and the money supply

Governments now call it “quantitative easing”. It used to be simply called inflating the currency. And it’s now official policy.

In the 1930s Keynes suggested burying banknotes and then paying people to dig them up. Ben Bernanke, current chairman of the US Federal Reserve, is said to have come up with a modern version:

“The most radical option is to send the newly-minted money directly to the US Government. It could then be handed out to citizens via tax relief. This form of monetary expansion would be equivalent to printing money and dropping it from helicopters for people to pick up – a graphically extreme proposal that earned the Fed chairman, Ben Bernanke, his nickname of Helicopter Ben” (*Times*, 18 December).

The present crisis is confirming some of the truths of Marxian economics. First, that banks cannot “create credit” out of nothing. Second, that the rise in the general price level, popularly but inaccurately called “inflation”, is caused by the government’s bank, the central bank, issuing more currency than the economy requires for its various transactions such as buying things, settling debts and paying taxes.

Inflation, which up to now politicians have been telling us is the main economic problem to avoid, is now being seen as one supposed way out of the deepening depression. After years of propaganda blaming inflation on wage increases, they now want the general price level to rise, and know how to bring this about – not by raising wages of course but by the government over-issuing the currency by printing more and more of it.

Seven years ago, when he was still only a governor of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, Bernanke explained how, with overissuing a paper currency that was not convertible on demand into a pre-fixed amount of gold, governments could create “positive inflation”:

“[U]nder a fiat (that is, paper) money system, a government (in practice, the central bank in cooperation with other agencies) should always be able to generate increased nominal spending and



inflation, even when the short-term nominal interest rate is at zero. (. . .) US dollars have value only to the extent that they are strictly limited in supply. But the US government has a technology, called a printing press (or, today, its electronic equivalent), that allows it to produce as many U.S. dollars as it wishes at essentially no cost. By increasing the number of US dollars in circulation, or even by credibly threatening to do so, the US government can also *reduce the value of a dollar in terms of goods and services, which is equivalent to raising the prices in dollars of those goods and services*. We conclude that, under a paper-money system, a determined government can always generate higher spending and hence positive inflation.” (Talk “Deflation: Making Sure It Doesn’t Happen Here”, 21 November 2002 at <http://www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/speeches/2002/20021121/default.htm#f8>)

What Bernanke describes here is simply inflating the currency, even though it’s now being called “quantitative easing”. Marx had already explained this 150 years ago in his *A Critique of Political Economy*, where he discussed what would happen if a government overissued what Bernanke calls “fiat money”:

“Let us assume that £14 million is the amount of gold required for the circulation of commodities and that the State throws 210 million notes each called £1 into circulation: these 210 million would then stand for total of gold worth £14 million. The effect would be the same as if the notes issued by the State were to represent a metal whose value was one-fifteenth that of gold or that each note was intended to represent one-fifteenth of the previous weight of gold. This would have changed nothing but the nomenclature of the standard of prices, which is of course purely conventional, quite

irrespective of whether it is brought about directly by a change in the monetary standard or indirectly by an increase in the number of paper notes issued in accordance with a new lower standard. As the name pound-sterling would now indicate one-fifteenth of the previous quantity of gold, all commodity-prices would be fifteen times higher and 210 million pound notes would now be indeed just as necessary as 14 million had previously been. The decrease in the quantity of gold which each individual token of value represented would be proportional to the increased aggregate value of these tokens.

The rise in prices would be merely a reaction of the process of circulation, which forcibly placed the token of value on a par with the quantity of gold which they are supposed to replace in the sphere of circulation."

This artificial bloating of monetary demand is what inflation, strictly speaking, means. Governments now want to consciously use this process to exert an upward pressure on the general price level to try to stop it falling as it would otherwise tend to in a deep recession. It might be thought, in view of all the publicity put out by supermarkets and chain stores about how they have all slashed prices more than their rivals, that falling prices would be a good thing. But this is not how the government sees it. They think that this would make the current depression worse, as they want to encourage people to spend whereas, with falling prices, people might postpone spending in the hope of prices falling even further.

Inflating the currency to try to stop money prices from falling is now the official policy of both the government and the Bank of England. That this is what is happening is being openly admitted. For instance, the financial journalist, Anatole Kaletsky, wrote in the *Times* (18 December) that "today the threat is deflation, not inflation" so that "central banks are right to flood the world economy with newly printed money – so long as they know when to stop", conceding that "a central bank that prints money to finance large-scale government spending is, in theory, moving into territory occupied by Zimbabwe and Weimar Germany".

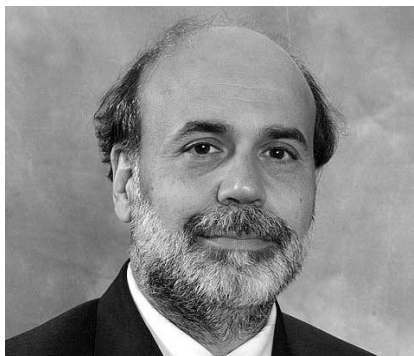
In a previous article (15 December) he had attempted a more sophisticated analysis, introducing the concepts of "monetary base" and "money multiplier". He gave the definition of the first as:

"banknotes issued by the Bank of England plus coins from the Royal Mint plus private bankers' deposits at the Bank of England and therefore

available at any time for conversion into banknotes with literally zero risk".

This is rather more than the currency as it includes deposits from banks at the Bank of England, which do not circulate and so do not have an effect on the general price level. Nevertheless, the currency makes up over half of this "base money".

According to Kaletsky, this figure is currently around £100 billion. He then introduces what he calls "broad money" defined as "all private sector bank and building society deposits, money market funds and so on". Reverting to the language of before



Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve

the credit crunch when it was thought that banks would never have any problem to lend money, Kaletsky refers to this "broad money" as being "created by private banks". This is highly misleading in that what the banks lend out has not been "created" by them but is the result of them acquiring other people's money in one way or another. It reflects what banks do, which is to recycle the purchasing power of those who don't want to use it immediately. He does, however, admit that "the moment there is an iota of doubt, bank deposits cease to be true money, as demonstrated by the queues outside Northern Rock last year".

Whether it is "true" money or not (and Marxists would say that it is not) the figure for "broad money" is some £1,900 billion. So, in Britain, the "money multiplier" is 19. Kaletsky notes that in other countries it is much less. In Japan it is 11, in the Eurozone 7.5 and in the US 5.3. He says that this means that Britain can safely afford to issue more "base money" and suggests a doubling to a further £100 billion, so reducing the "money multiplier" to about 10.

If all of this additional "base money" were to be in the form of notes and coin this would amount to a massive inflation of the currency, bringing it way above what the economy needs for its transactions (especially as, in a depression, the

number of these will fall). Kaletsky envisages this to a certain extent as he mentions the Bank of England buying government bonds or even providing money directly to the government to spend, both of which would involve printing more currency

In fact, facilitating the buying of government bonds with new money has been the way that successive governments have, intentionally or not, inflated the currency in Britain since 1940 and why the general price level has risen continuously since then. Kaletsky explained in his 18 December article how this worked in the US. The Federal Reserve Bank, as the central bank, will buy government bonds and

"will pay for them simply by making electronic transfers into the bank accounts of the people or institutions selling. For every \$1 million worth of assets bought, the Fed will transfer \$1 million of new money into private bank accounts. This 'money' will come literally out of nowhere. It will simply be an electronic blip on the Fed's computer. Because electronic deposits at the Fed are the ultimate form of legal tender in the US system, the result will be that the US economy has \$1 million more money."

When these banks draw on the extra amount in their accounts extra currency is brought into circulation which, if it more than is required by the economy (as it has been), leads to the rise in general price level popularly called inflation

Kaletsky had already explained in a previous article (11 December) where the money to try to spend a way out of the depression was likely to come from:

"For the next year or two, the money for the British fiscal stimulus will come from the Bank of England's printing works in Dedham. In the case of the far bigger job-creation schemes and industry bailouts planned by Barack Obama, the money will come from the Washington and Fort Worth facilities of the US Bureau of Engraving and Printing, an institution rejoicing in the most succinctly descriptive internet address I have encountered: www.moneyfactory.gov."

Burying bank notes and digging them up again. Dropping them from helicopters for people to pick up. In fact even using printed coloured pieces of paper to have access to what you need. These are crackpot ideas compared with the simple socialist proposition to produce things for use not for sale at a profit, so ending the need to use money at all.

ADAM BUICK

SIGNING ON



As unemployment spreads more workers will experience the harsh new regime at their local JobCentre.

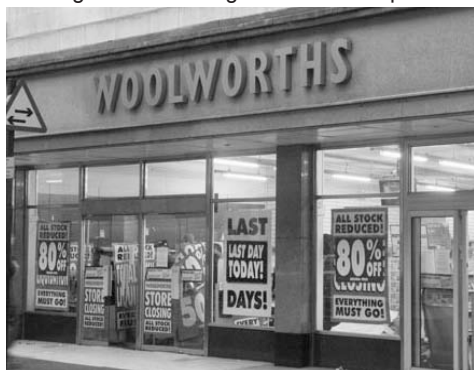
“British jobs for British workers” was certainly a catchy phrase for Gordon Brown to use, even if he did use it without thinking first. He has done this on a number of occasions now, using unguarded words that in the end have come back to haunt him, such as his oft-repeated claim to have ended the boom-bust cycle.

Our Gordon views protectionism as “the greatest danger the world now faces”. For sure, his British worker remark was never meant to offer a jobs guarantee. But as unemployment soars towards three million and beyond, so understandably workers will want to take this Prime Minister’s words at face value when many are becoming fearful of joining the ever growing and overflowing reservoir of unemployment.

What started off as a trickle following the much spoken about and on the face of it a new addition to the international vocabulary and language of economists, ‘The Credit Crunch’, has now evolved into a fast flowing river that around the world is sweeping millions into an ocean of uncertainty.

Rising unemployment in China has seen 26 million internal migrant workers from the countryside lose their jobs due to the economic slowdown, and in an almost a copycat move this state capitalist government announced a 4 trillion Yuan stimulus last November to prop up the weakening economy and spur on domestic consumption as the demand for its goods flags in Western countries. By focusing on the country’s 700 million rural residents with a campaign to persuade them to spend more, along with other measures announced such as state subsidies for farmers to buy electrical appliances, the government hopes these efforts will help rejuvenate flagging economic growth at a time when increasing unemployment has raised concerns about potential social unrest.

In a clear manifestation that the economic crisis is rapidly heading into a severe global clinical depression, US employers



purged 598,000 jobs in January, the most job losses in a single month since 1974. January’s firings in the US raised the unemployment rate there to 7.6 percent, the highest level

since 1992. Unemployment rose in Germany by an additional 387,000 in January compared to the previous month, for a total of 3.49 million without work. This pushed up the jobless rate by 0.9 percent, to 8.3 percent. Unemployment in the former East Germany, with a rate of 13.9 percent, is still twice as high as in the West, which stands at 6.9 percent.

In Britain likewise, workers have been sent off to the dole office in their thousands. Since Christmas we have all seen and read the reports of the 27,000 Woolworths workers laid off in the opening weeks of the New Year, and all indicators pointing to things getting far worse. Over the past year more than 3,000 UK firms went into administration – some 1,006 companies in the third quarter alone.

There have been a number of high profile casualties of which the retail chain store Woolworths, with some 800-plus stores nationwide, is the most notable. But it has been followed by the furniture retailer MFI, music chain Zavvi, furniture and home accessories store The Pier, menswear retailer The Officers Club, tea and coffee merchant Whittards of Chelsea, children’s clothing retailer Adams, fashion retailer USC and women’s clothing retailer Viyella. In total, some 40,000 jobs have been lost or are at risk.

As this economic crisis deepens at home and abroad, its human toll becomes even more evident. Thousands are facing job losses or being offered an enforced shorter working week as this malignant disease spreads. Ford, General Motors, Honda, Nissan, Toyota, Tata Steel have all announced job cuts or temporary shutdowns at UK plants. BT has said 10,000 posts are to be slashed – many of those in the firing line will be agency and contract workers, some of whom have worked for BT for years. In Construction, workers in an already battered Industry have been warned to brace themselves for an ‘avalanche of job losses’.

On 6 February, it was widely reported in the *Times* and other newspapers that Royal Mail intends to shed 16,000 jobs as it strives to cut costs. This new threat to jobs comes despite record profits, the proposed job losses — amounting to almost one in ten of the company’s workforce in a drive to reduce the wage bill by £470 million — come as unions prepare to fight the introduction of a commercial partner to the business.

According to the *Independent*, “unemployment “could easily reach three million by Christmas next”. The hardest hit will be workers with large mortgages, soaring utility bills and the mountain of debt accumulated during the so-called ‘boom years’ when many of us were pushed and persuasively encouraged by banks and others into using loans and credit cards to maintain a half-decent lifestyle.

And now as unemployment and the fortnightly visit to the local Job-centre-plus looms, it will undoubtedly become a routine and habitual preoccupation for many; the experience may have a profound impact on some who have never as yet sampled the devised arm-twisting of this government service increasingly given over to persuading the unemployed to take

up low paid employment. Indeed how the times have changed, and are changing, even for the unemployed, and the way they are treated at the local job centre. If you are one of the unfortunate unemployed you may be familiar with its ambience these days, it's a far cry from Charlie Drake's television show *The Worker*. Most job centres employ uniformed security guards equipped with radios to control clamant progression within the building and some display wall posters forbidding the wearing of baseball caps and hoodies. From day one of a new claim the claimant is forced into signing an agreement that sets out what he/she will do to find work, with the threat of sanctions for any ineffectual claimant's failure to provide enough evidence of actively seeking work.

Commentators have forecast that young people in particular will be pushed out of the labour market by the global downturn. With many anticipating an increase in youth unemployment—to levels last seen in the early 1980s, when riots swept many inner-city areas—the *Guardian* reported that "Brown was concerned by the recent youth riots in Greece, and feared something similar could develop in Britain."

The recent 'reforms' introduced by New Labour's Work and Pensions Secretary, James Purnell, in the last Queens Speech, represent an attack on some of the poorest people and their families in our society. They are more evidence that the poor will be made to suffer for an economic crisis that is not of their making. Purnell claims that the changes will "transform lives", but it may prove in the long run to be a transformation for the worse. Even the Tory leader David Cameron heaped on praise, saying that he is "thrilled" with the plan.

All those currently on 'out-of-work benefits' will be affected, as benefits will be renamed (Employment Support Allowance) and altered. The main aim of the changes is to force at least one million people on out-of-work benefits into low paid jobs.

The draconian measures include forcing people to work for their measly dole money. After one year of unemployment, claimants will have to do four weeks of work. After two years, they will have to work continuously for their benefits, doing work "such as community work", previously only undertaken by people with criminal convictions.

Incapacity claimants will face harrowing questioning and more frequent tests and a medical check from someone other than their own GP. Single parents will have to seek work when their youngest child is seven. Drug-reported addicts will be required to have treatment.

The proposals originally set alongside plans to increase private sector delivery, consequently reducing jobs in the public sector and ensuring that rich pickings for private enterprise come before all else. The government's flagship policy to revolutionize welfare by paying private companies to find jobs for the unemployed has since been thrown into crises as firms said there were too many people out of work - and too few vacancies - to make it viable. Responding to warnings that his reforms will not work without major changes, James Purnell,

has abandoned plans to announce the preferred bidders for the multi-million-pound contracts. This follows demands from the firms involved for hundreds of millions more in "up-front" cash payments. The government have dressed up the proposals as part of its fight against poverty, sometimes using the slogan 'work works.' But over half of children living in poverty are in working households with millions of people on low wages that make them little better off than being on benefits.

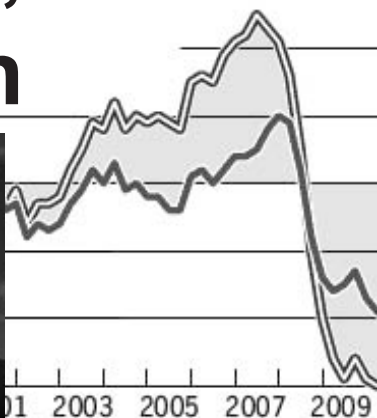
The world global economic downturn could see 40 million people lose their jobs by the end of the year with worldwide unemployment hitting between 210 and 230 million, with the inevitable consequences of more of the world's populations cascading down into poverty.

Unemployment is encrusting and besetting the world as workers in every industrialized county are made to pay the price as companies downsize operations in order to survive a crisis of capitalism of its own making. Workers the world over, have more in common with each other than the state frontiers and fostered patriotism of race hatred. It's a mistake to fall for the theories or racial connotations which capitalism's apologists use to excuse the many failings of the social system. The only protectionism that needs to be dismantled is that which still denies workers a shortfall of life's essentials. By removing exploitation and the human suffering arising from both poverty and war socialism will enable men and women to be set free, living lives in the security of world community.

NL



Boom, boom Brown



Despite his claim to have stopped the boom-slump cycle being refuted, Gordon Brown still thinks he can stop the depression getting worse.

There was a sketch in “The Two Ronnies” years ago which now comes irresistibly to mind. Ronnie Corbett played the sucker, the naïve innocent who had already bought a large black lump of “moon-rock” – from the coalman. The same man had now sold him “an Argentinian racing pigeon”, which was without any question an obvious and unmistakable duck. Ronnie Barker’s character desperately tried to get him to acknowledge the fact, without success. The more the details about the transaction came out, the less doubt there could have been.

“It’s got webbed feet, and goes quack quack.” – “It’s a duck!”

“No, really – it did escape, but I caught it again.” “Where did you catch it?” “On the duck-pond.” “It’s a duck!”

“No honestly, it’s got a name and everything.” “What’s its name?” “Donald.” “It’s a duck!”

It’s a slump

It’s exactly the same now with the present crash of the economy. It’s a slump!

Politicians and journalists call it a downturn, a credit crunch, a bubble bursting, a few greedy bankers getting it wrong, or a problem with American sub-prime mortgages. It’s a slump!

Lord Myners, the “City Minister” in the present Government (*Observer*, 25 January), said it was “a correction back towards an equilibrium”. It’s a slump!

Gordon Brown (*BBC Ceefax*, 26 January) claimed it was “the difficult birth-pangs of a new global order”. It’s a slump!

Gordon Brown again, in an interview on TV’s *Today* programme (23 January): “It’s a global banking crisis . . . It’s quite different from anything that we’ve dealt with before.” No, it isn’t, it’s a slump!

Boom and bust

It might be worthwhile reminding ourselves of what all this boom and bust actually means. In a capitalist society, the whole power of the state’s propaganda

machine – press, radio, television, pulpits, government pronouncements, everything – is geared to one all-encompassing end: that the inescapable fate of the working class is to spend their entire working lives labouring for the benefit of the owning class. When nearly all the work force has knuckled down to this unavoidable destiny, it is called a boom. But every so often problems occur in the smooth functioning of this system; and they have occurred every so often ever since we’ve had capitalism. And when that happens, large numbers of the working class, despite having been brainwashed from early childhood into believing that there is no way to run society other than producing surplus value for the owning class – large numbers of them are then told they will not even be allowed to fulfil this divine decree, to work for the capitalists. On the one side, the work is obviously there to be done – food must be produced, clothing must be made, houses must be built – and all the raw materials are there, ready and waiting, or easily able to be produced. And on the other side, there are people desperately wanting to eat food, and to protect themselves from the weather with clothing and houses and so on: but where the owning class cannot see exactly how to make a profit out of it, then nobody is allowed to grow the food, make the clothes, build the houses, and all the rest of it. And it’s called a slump.

Then along comes Gordon Brown. Despite all the airy-fairy talk, all the fine-sounding speeches in which he even had the nerve to talk about “socialism”, all the hot air by which he was able to build his career in student politics, then on the back benches of the House of Commons, and finally as a leading member of the Government – despite all this, he then took over the job of running capitalism. Immediately he began to claim that he was bringing in enormous improvements. The working class would still have to devote themselves to producing surplus value for the owners; but at least they would be allowed to do it, without the threat of the sack, and then long months or

years on the sidelines, forcibly prevented from doing any of the jobs which obviously need to be done, wasting away in idleness. Gordon Brown was going to stop all these downturns, or recessions, or depressions, or slumps. No more boom and bust!

Basil Brush

For years Brown announced to the House of Commons, to the Labour Party conferences, to anyone who would give him a platform, that he had at last transformed capitalism. From now on, there would be no more slumps: it would be just like Basil Brush, “boom, boom!” and boom again.

But capitalism goes on its own sweet way, ignoring the posturings of the politicians and all their promises. Ed Balls, Brown’s close ally, says the economic situation is the worst “for over 100 years”, which is a bit sad for the Labour Government, after nearly twelve years in power. So now the ducking and diving begins. Repeatedly Brown ignored the demands that he recant or apologize for what has now been revealed to be so much empty bombast. Finally, driven into a corner, he produced a lame apology: “I actually said ‘No more Tory boom and bust’” (*Daily Mail*, 11 October 2008).

Well, the statistics are that Brown boasted about ending “boom and bust” some eighteen times since 1997, and once, certainly, he linked this “boom and bust” specifically to the Tory party. He said to the 2000 Labour Party conference: “We will not put hard won economic stability at risk. No return to short-termism. No return

“Brown has boasted about ending ‘boom and bust’ some eighteen times since 1997”

to Tory boom and bust. Why did the Tory party give Britain twenty years of stop-go, twenty years of boom and bust? It is Labour that is now the party for stability and growth."

So there you are – according to this speech it was only "Tory boom and bust" that he was getting rid of. As if Labour boom and bust would satisfy everybody! But over and over again Brown has claimed that it is boom and bust as such that he has ended for ever. If he meant – when he asserted "I actually said 'No more Tory boom and bust'" – that he always said that, then the unfortunate fact is that any such implication is simply untrue. Apparently Brown's famous "moral compass", which he "learned from his mother and father", did not seem to work this time. Let us recall a few of the things which he "actually said".

A new economic framework

Gordon Brown's first pre-budget report, 1997: "For over 40 years our economy has an unenviable history, under governments of both parties, of boom and bust. So, against a background of monetary uncertainty and instability in the global economy, we set about establishing a new economic framework to secure long-term economic stability and put an end to the

"As I have said before, Mr Deputy Speaker, 'No return to boom and bust'." Budget Speech, 2006

damaging cycle of boom and bust." So if it was "under governments of both parties", it wasn't only "Tory boom and bust", was it?

Gordon Brown's speech to the British Chambers of Commerce national conference, April 2000: "The government has created a new economic framework to avoid the historic British problem – the violence of the repeated boom and bust cycles of the past."

Gordon Brown's speech to the Labour Party conference, 2004: "No longer the boom-bust economy".

Gordon Brown's speech to the Labour Party conference, 2005: "Why has it been that at every point since 1997 faced with the Asian crisis, the IT collapse, a stock exchange crash, an American recession, last year a house price bubble, this year rising world oil prices, why has it been that at every point since 1997 Britain uniquely has continued to grow? In any other decade, a house price bubble would have pushed Britain from boom to bust." So if that would have happened "in *any* other decade", Brown was again making the point that it wasn't only "Tory boom and bust".

Gordon Brown's budget speech, 2006: "As I have said before, Mr Deputy Speaker, 'No return to boom and bust'."

Gordon Brown's budget speech, 2007: "We will never return to the old boom and bust."

So Gordon Brown wasn't actually being accurate when he said it was only "Tory boom and bust" he had got rid of. Yet at each General Election, many voters solemnly believe the politicians' assertions that this time, capitalism is going to be run for the benefit of all. But it never is. It can't be.

ALWYN EDGAR



Silly money

We mentioned last month that currency crank ideas flourish in a slump as the problem appears to be a lack of money, as implied by the term "credit crunch". The government itself seems to accept this view as it thinks that pumping money into the banks will solve the problem. As this is not working (because banks are not going to throw good money after bad by lending to firms they think won't make enough profit, due to the slump, to be able to share some of it with them as interest) others are coming up with other proposals.

One of these is the Green guru, Georges Monbiot. In his column in the *Guardian* (20 January), headed "If the state can't save us, we need a licence to print our own money", he endorsed the proposal for local communities to be able to issue their own money. He mentions various historical examples from Germany, Austria and Switzerland (he was discussing a book on money by a German author that he had just read). All these happened to be linked to the ideas of the German currency crank, Silvio Gesell, mentioned in this column last month, whose pet theory was that money should lose its value if it wasn't spent within a give time period. But they don't have to be.

Monbiot makes the following claim for local currencies :

"We need not wait for the government or the central bank to save us: we can set this system up ourselves. It costs taxpayers nothing. It bypasses the greedy banks. It recharges local economies and gives local businesses an advantage over multinationals".

Last September one such scheme came into operation in Lewes, Sussex. A "Lewes Pound" was issued and started circulating. But it seems more a scheme to get people to use local shops than an alternative, local, "green", way of encouraging people to spend the way out of the crisis. As the organisers themselves say on their site (www.thelewespound.org/):

"[I]t is easiest to think of it as a gift voucher or a book token: A Lewes Pound is a voucher worth 1 pound that can only be redeemed at locally owned participating stores."

The Lewes Pounds get into circulation by people buying them for ordinary pounds and are convertible back into pounds on demand. In answer to the question "What happens to the sterling pounds that are taken when people buy Lewes Pounds?" the organisers explain: "All Sterling pounds are held in a safe deposit box with a local bank, so that we can access them at any time should people wish to trade their Lewes Pounds back into Sterling". They go on to say that this means that the introduction of Lewes Pounds won't have an inflationary effect "as there is no additional currency added to the total pool because for each Lewes Pound that is brought into circulation a Pound Sterling is taken out of circulation." In that case, then, it's not an alternative way of pumping more money into the economy for people to spend a way out of the crisis.

The organisers themselves don't make the wild claims for local currencies that Monbiot does. In fact they are surprisingly honest. In answer to the question "Isn't it just silly money? Lewes Pounds aren't going to make a difference" they reply "initially, it won't make a difference from an economic perspective, as the number of Lewes Pound released is minimal compared to the size of the Lewes economy".

That in fact is the whole point. All such schemes are only ever going to be marginal compared with the total amount of local buying and selling, debt settling and tax paying transactions. They are not going to make any difference in a depression. Their aim is essentially, as Monbiot puts it, to "give local businesses an advantage over multinationals". Another inter-capitalist dispute not to get involved in, then.

Threats and threats

Are there really terrorists round every corner or is this just government hype to scare us into supporting them?

What's the biggest threat in the world today for most of the world's population? Judging by the airtime allocated by news media, the column inches of print media, the numerous books published in the last handful of years and the massive budget allocated worldwide to its defeat, it must be terrorism. Terrorism is good for sales and viewing figures. "Breaking News" is a sure-fire attention catcher. At the end of November Mumbai experienced a series of horrific, coordinated acts of violence which killed over 180 people, mainly civilians.

Sri Lanka has its ongoing struggle with the Tamil Tigers, Turkey the PKK, Spain ETA, Colombia the FARC, etc; all named "terrorist organisations." Acts of terrorism occur daily in both Iraq and Afghanistan, individual suicide bombers, car and truck bombs killing single figures, dozens or scores of victims whilst guided missiles from the coalition forces create death and destruction for countless thousands of innocent victims. Since September 2001 the world's biggest powers have allowed themselves every possible opportunity to wreak retribution wherever they have deemed there to be a terrorist threat, even against the will of the majority of their electorates. Around 3,000 deaths in New York and Washington, horrific, inexcusable deaths, have been the precursor to untold thousands since – each one as horrific and inexcusable as the originals – but most of these excused as collateral damage by the powerful.

President Obama has vowed to carry on the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and to capture or kill Osama bin Laden. No doubt UK forces will be expected to continue to play their role too. By continuing the occupation many argue that more Afghans are and will continue to join the insurgency, the Taliban, because what they want more than anything is to remove the foreign occupiers from their soil. This is one of the poorest nations on earth but it is seen as one of the greatest threats to the richest nation on earth. Coincidentally, of the aid money actually contributed 40% has found its way back to the donor countries as consultant salaries and corporate profits. A mere \$9 billion of aid has been spent in Afghanistan since 2002. Aid commitments have fallen well short of the promises; US still owes half of its pledged \$10.4 billion; the World Bank still owes nearly half of its pledged \$1.6 billion; UK is one of a few which has nearly met its commitment. (Matt Waldman/ACBAR Advocacy Series 'Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan' March 2008 – from *New Internationalist*, November 2008)

War, invasion or occupation is excellent business, especially for the wealthy and the wealthy are very happy to keep the media on board to help cultivate misconceptions and broadcast them loud, clear and often, subjecting consumers to manufactured threats until most of us believe the unbelievable: – That there is a terrorist threat. That there are terrorists around every corner, at every airport, in every subway, maybe even living in your street. But look at the numbers, at the actual threat. (The following statistics relate to the US and are taken from Michael Moore's *Dude, Where's My Country?*) For Americans, in 2001, the chance of dying in an act of terrorism was 1 in 100,000; as a result of murder 1 in 14,000; by suicide 1 in 9,200; in a car accident 1 in 6,500; or from flu or pneumonia 1 in 4,500. Statistics like these will vary from country to country but the general risk of death as a result of terrorism is much, much lower than

that of death on the road or from heart disease or even from suicide, but you don't see people getting paranoid about getting into cars day after day. Even if you are born in Afghanistan you are more likely to die of malnutrition or health-related factors – 25% of children die before they are 5 years old and maternal mortality is 1,800 per 100,000 (compared with 8 in the UK). To repeat: even in the year of the biggest terrorist act in the US the chance of dying from terrorism was 1 in 100,000, but year on year the chance of dying in childbirth in Afghanistan is 1,800 in 100,000. (UNICEF 2008)

Who knows this? Does it make any difference?

We need to get a sense of reality and balance. We need to recognise these manufactured, hyped-up threats for what they are. Terrorism will not be overcome by state-sponsored terrorism. Recognizing all lives as having similar worth would be an excellent start for world leaders – as they like to hear themselves called; even recognizing their own electorate as having worth on a par with their own would be an improvement.

A different threat, one which could claim the lives of untold numbers, suddenly and possibly without warning, is the nuclear threat. This threat is impossible to quantify. Proliferation is the name of the game now. Those with most of the nuclear weapons don't want those without to have any but keep on stockpiling themselves, refining and upgrading, supplying their favoured clients whilst insisting that those without shall remain without. That the industrial-military complex is so vast and carries such clout with governments (politicians are prized among board members), coupled with the readily available terrorist threat with which to alert and frighten the public forever increases the possibility of disaster. Depleted uranium weapons have been in regular use for a number of years causing death outright to immediate victims, a slower, painful death following debilitating illness for other victims, war veterans and local populations alike and massively increased numbers of severe birth defects in the "theatre of operations" – not to mention environmental disasters. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. We can tolerate such horrors. The slow drip of outright cruelty

and inhumanity on mankind and its habitat can be borne, it seems.

Dr. Helen Caldicott, founder of 'Physicians for Social Responsibility' and a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize explains in her book "The New Nuclear Danger" in clear and unequivocal language how close the world has already been to all-out nuclear war and how simple human or computer error could trigger the destruction of the planet at any time. It used to be called the nuclear "deterrent" but terrorists, especially suicide bombers, are hardly likely to be deterred. They haven't been so far.

If we do manage to progress without mutual nuclear annihilation then the other great threat is the one that millions of ordinary folk are focussed upon but which is being treated far too lightly by world governments, that is the challenge of global warming and climate change. Both the pamphlet *An Inconvenient Question – Socialism and the Environment* and the DVD "Poles Apart? Capitalism or Socialism as the planet heats up", recently published by the Socialist Party address this subject convincingly. There can be little doubt in anyone's mind that the threat to our environment is real and urgent.

Whether there is political will to confront this threat with the same enthusiasm and almost unlimited budget thrown at the war against terrorism and the continued development of nuclear weapons of all kinds is most definitely in doubt. It's clear there is repeat business and plenty of profit in weapons of all kinds but the environment is just another poor relation leaving us with the obvious conclusion that, in fact, it is capitalism itself which is our greatest threat.

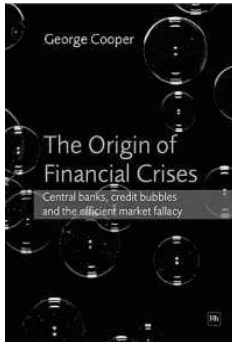
JANET SURMAN



Inflation Monster

The Origin of Financial Crises.

George Cooper. 2008. Harriman House. £16.99



Even though this book isn't written by a Marxist but by someone taking much of his inspiration from Keynes, it is for the most part well worth reading as an explanation of asset

price bubbles. It is also, at root, a good attack on 'efficient markets hypothesis' – the view that prices accurately reflect all known information at any one point in time and that markets are efficient allocators of resources.

Few conventional writers on economics come to the same conclusions as Marx without mentioning him or otherwise being aware of him, though Cooper seemingly manages it on two counts: his analysis of the causes of asset price bubbles, and his analysis of the cause of inflation and the role it plays within capitalism.

While he uses language more loosely sometimes than he might, talking freely about 'credit creation' when it is clear that what he means by this is the constant recycling of deposits into loans by the banking system rather than the creation of credit out of thin air, his explanation of asset price bubbles is sound. Essentially he takes the view that the process of the circulation of capital in the market economy is aided by the extension of credit and that this inherently gives rise to the possibility of financial dislocation and crisis (as did Marx, even if Marx argued that this possibility only became a reality when a crisis of overproduction for particular markets took place in the real economy).

Though it is something of a generalisation, Cooper contends that the tendency of markets for commodities to respond to rising prices through falling demand is not matched by the behaviour of markets for financial assets, which have a tendency to generate *increased* demand when prices rise (being typically intended for investment not consumption). This process can act in reverse, because when prices for commodities fall demand then

generally increases, but when asset prices fall, demand for them falls too, as in the current financial crisis.

This is partly because much of the credit extended to purchase the assets has been granted by the banks against underlying collateral that is losing its nominal value. In this sense, there is no supposedly efficient pricing mechanism to reallocate resources – merely self-feeding panic as falling asset prices lead to enforced asset sales, and then further price declines caused by this lead to yet more asset sales as a consequence: 'the process of collateralised lending generates one of the key destabilising forces in financial markets. Borrowers whose assets have already fallen in value may not have additional collateral to hand, and the bank's decision to sell their collateral, into what is by definition a falling market, may simply exacerbate the borrowers' and the bank's losses.' (p.100). This is essentially what has been happening during the credit crunch.

His analysis of what he calls the 'inflation monster' also largely hits the mark. While he does not overtly use a labour theory of value, he traces the origins of money through the establishment of gold as a recognised standard and store of value, and then considers the development of gold depository certificates and paper money as a consequence of this. He argues that with the expansion and contraction of money and credit during trade cycles, prices rise in booms and then fall in slumps but there can be no permanent tendency towards inflation while money is convertible into gold.

When convertibility into gold is suspended then the inflation monster can (and has been) unleashed by governments and central bankers: 'The new currency regime, without a gold exchange rate, is known as fiat money. The movement from a currency backed by gold to one with no fixed gold price represented a momentous shift in our financial architecture . . . Governments had now awarded themselves the right to create their own money without any corresponding liability; since there was no longer a promise to convert the printed money into gold, there was no longer a liability associated with printing that money' (p.69). In other words, governments could inject excess purchasing power into the system, in the form of an over-issue of inconvertible paper currency, that would only serve to push up prices.

Cooper identifies the collapse of the Bretton Woods international trading system in 1971 when the dollar was no longer pegged to gold as the definitive moment here, though in truth full convertibility had been suspended long before this in the US and all other advanced economies (in Britain it was as early as 1931 and by the time of the collapse of Bretton Woods in 1971 only around 1 per cent of the currency issue in the UK had even a nominal gold backing).

He argues that an excess issue of inconvertible paper currency can be directly used to finance government expenditure, as he thinks is about to happen now. He also makes the point – as have we – that there is a sense that governments prefer rising prices to falling prices partly on the grounds that it can increase their net tax-take, and perhaps because industrial unrest is more likely when workers have to resist falling wages than when they have what are generally rising nominal (if not real) wages under inflationary conditions. This partly presupposes that governments recognise a causal link between an excess note issue and rising prices, which is a moot point – though he also includes an interesting quote from Ben Bernanke, before he became chairman of the US Federal Reserve, which illustrates that there is certainly recognition of a linkage of sorts (even if they might view it as just one cause of inflation alongside others).

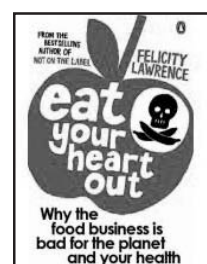
The tentative recommendations that Cooper makes later in the book for dealing with capitalism's financial crises need not detain us too long, though it is interesting to note that the inability of mainstream economics to adequately account for the current crisis is again leading others towards the type of analysis that has all too rarely been seen, in recent decades, outside the pages of the *Socialist Standard*.

DAP

Food Business

Eat Your Heart Out. Felicity

Lawrence. Penguin. £8.99.



Following on from *Not on the Label*, this is another book by Felicity Lawrence that exposes much that's wrong with the

food we eat and the way it's produced and, therefore, much that's wrong with capitalism as a way of running the world.

Lawrence describes conventional farming as 'a system for turning oil into food'. There is simply more profit in industrial food production than in plain healthy food like fruit and veg. Consequently consumers' food choices are manipulated, so that we 'want' what the food industry sells at the biggest profit and we buy what we have been persuaded to buy. This is mainly achieved by advertising, but also by more insidious means: adding massive amounts of sugar to baby food gets babies, and therefore children and adults, hooked on sweetness.

Let's take a couple of case studies. Processed cereals, for instance, represent 'a triumph of marketing'. And agricultural subsidies from government help to keep companies' costs down and profits up. The nutritious part of cornflakes is deliberately removed because it gets in the way of a long shelf life. As a result of this and the addition of sugar, breakfast cereals fatten you up but provide little by way of nutrition. Since relatively few countries eat much cereal, there is plenty of scope for global expansion, with Kellogg's targeting a potential 1.5 billion new customers, and prepared to spend massively to attract them.

The globalised pork and bacon industry has based its enormous profits on two elements: factory farming with little or no regard to the environmental impact, and low wages mostly paid to migrant workers. The farmers who contract to raise pigs for the processing companies make just enough to get by, and the buildings they invest in are likely to put them in debt to the bank. Meanwhile the big corporations enjoy enormous profits with relatively little capital investment.

As the cereal example shows, food produced with an eye to profit is not good for you, and may be positively dangerous. Sugar, for instance, has been described as being as harmful and addictive as tobacco. The evidence is not conclusive, but arguably the extent of cardiovascular diseases in developed countries is in part due to an imbalance of fatty acids (too much omega-6, not enough omega-3). Cancers, too, are in part caused by our diet. Soya is seen as a miracle health food, but it is in fact a key ingredient in the fried and oiled junk food market.

Lawrence has provided a graphic description of profit-driven food

Meetings

East Anglia

Sunday **8 March**, 12 noon to 4pm
12 noon: informal chat/branch business
2pm to 4pm: continuation, discussion of r Conference items and Party's website A-Z of Marxism.
Reindeer, 10 Dereham Road, Norwich, NR2 4AY.

Sunday **22 March**, 7pm
Film showing: *ZEITGEIST ADDENDUM*
With introduction, interval and discussion.
Garden House, 1 Pembroke Rd, Norwich NR2 3HD

London

Film nights at Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4.

Saturday **14 March**, 6pm

(documentary on the Israeli-Palestine conflict) Opener: Jim Lawrie.

Saturday **28 March**, 6pm

(Rural community of Dover, Pennsylvania, is torn apart in the latest battle over the teaching of evolution)
Opener: Simon Wigley



production. We can't agree with her claim that what's needed is 'a fairer distribution of the profits', since that would leave the profit motive intact. But we have more sympathy with her conclusion that it's necessary to examine 'the power structures that control food supply', as long as this goes along with overturning the structure of all production and distribution.

Manchester

Monday **23 March**, 8.30pm
Branch meeting. Discussion on: THE PRIORITIES OF SOCIALISM
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

Lothians Discussion Group

(under the auspices of the Socialist Party of Great Britain's Edinburgh Branch)
Venue: ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh
Every 4th Wednesday of the Month
Time: 7.30pm-9.00pm
Contact:
Fraser Anderson: Fraser@prolerat.org
Jimmy Moir: jimmy@prolerat.org

Capitalism in Crisis: A May Day School for Socialism!

Saturday **2 May** 10.30am till 6.00pm
The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street SW4 7UN Tube: Clapham North

IS THE PROFIT SYSTEM WORKING?

1. Capitalism & Economics - Brian Gardner (Glasgow Socialist Party)
2. Capitalism, Resources and the Environment - Gwynn Thomas (South London Socialist Party)
3. Capitalism & Society - Simon Wigley (Central London Socialist Party).

Food and Refreshments will be available:

Advance notice - Public debate

Thursday **23 April**, 7.30
SHOULD CAPITALISM HAVE A FUTURE?

Yes: John Meadowcroft (Lecturer in Public Policy)

No: Richard Headicar (Socialist Party)
Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1



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Obituaries

TERRY LAWLOR

We regret to have to report the death, in January, of our comrade Terry Lawlor at the age of 84. Terry joined the Party in 1942 when he was just 17. From a working class background, he studied hard to become a medical student and it was because of this that he was exempt from military service during the Second World War and served instead as an air raid fire warden on the roof of Chatham House, the home of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Within a short time he had established himself as one of the Party's many notable characters in this period, becoming a prominent and vociferous Party

speaker, particularly on the outdoor platform in his main stomping grounds of South London, such as at East Street, Walworth.

The rumbustious image he had in the Party (immortalised in Barltrop's *The Monument*) was in some ways at odds with both his gentler, private persona and the career he developed as a consultant psychiatrist, even if at one point in the 1970s he was at the centre of a national controversy about the running of a psychiatric hospital in London, his supposed role in which he strongly denied.

Never one to shy away from public debate, Terry became known in the Party as probably the most

prominent advocate of the view that as the contradictions of capitalism must sharpen over time, then so must wars and world economic crises become progressively worse. When a major slump had failed to appear after the Second World War, the Party became more cautious about such pronouncements than it had been in the period when Terry had first joined, and he eventually left the Party in 1953 after a dispute over the issue.

He remained in contact with the Party, however, for decades, reading (and often selling) the *Socialist Standard*, before eventually rejoining in 1991. He then served on the Party's World Economic Crisis Committee (set up to re-examine the issue closest to his heart) and resumed speaking for the Party and writing occasionally for the *Standard* on economic issues, being influenced by his understanding of Marxian economics and also the views of business analysts like the 'bearish' investment guru Bob Beckman. It is a sad irony - not lost on his comrades - that Terry died in the middle of the major financial crisis he had long predicted.

DAP

Mikoyan's Bluff Called



Recognition of the truth sometimes comes out of strange places and no one could have been more surprised than Mr. Mikoyan that it should have been Mr. Dulles who told him that he, Mikoyan, does not know what Socialism is. But so it happened.

It was at the end of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister's visit to America. When all the dinners and interviews, the speeches and cocktail parties were over, the time came to part. Mr. Mikoyan gave his farewell message to reporters at the airport, and said :—

"Socialist society in our country will develop whether you like it or not, and whether we want it or not. American capitalism is still strong. The conclusion is that we must be tolerant of each other and come to agreement." (*Daily Telegraph*, 21st January, 1959.)

Then came the slap in the eye from Mr. Dulles, in a telegram to Mikoyan :—

"The President is aware that you operate under a system of State capitalism, and he hopes that has been useful to you to have seen the progress of our people under our system of individual capitalism. We are sure that you have found the experience interesting." (*Daily Telegraph*, 21st January, 1959.)

We have no doubt that Mr. Mikoyan found it a novel and interesting experience to have his bluff called at top level about the fake "Socialism" of Russia, and bluntly to be told that Dulles sees it for what it really is, "State Capitalism."

May we hope from this beginning that the representatives of all the countries will, at U.N. and other international gatherings, develop the habit of calling State and private capitalism by their proper name everywhere and on all occasions ?

(Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, March 1959)

AMBROSE COWAP

Central London are saddened to have to report the death in January, at the age of 75, of Comrade Amby Cowap. He joined the old Hackney branch in 1967 but left a few years later on returning to Ireland, where he hailed from. Back in London he rejoined in 1983. A roofer by trade, he redid the roof of our head office in Clapham and was always available to deal with repairs to it. On his retirement he left London to live in Lowestoft in Sussex. Our condolences go to his widow and family.

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Brand Obama – more drivell

Is there – can there be – a connection between Barack Obama and two West London Labour MPs?

Obama has just moved into the White House at the head of the most powerful nation, controlling a military, diplomatic and economic force so huge as to be able to invade, distort and destroy the lives of the majority of the world's people. Against that the two MPs – Andrew Slaughter and Virendra Sharma – are notably low-key. Their constituencies – Ealing Acton Shepherds Bush and Ealing Southall – are unremarkable for their grime, chaos and disorder. The MPs held minor posts as Parliamentary Private Secretaries – Slaughter at the Foreign Office and Sharma at the Home Office – but their resignation from these provoked hardly a murmur of interest. The reason they jumped off the lowest levels of the Greasy Pole was their objection to the government's plans, in betrayal of a succession of pledges, to further develop Heathrow Airport, specifically by laying down a third runway. In Sharma's case this was something of an aberration, for he was not an active MP – apart from slavishly voting for the government line. If they had not already done so, Slaughter and Sharma might have learned something from this experience about the essential ruthlessness of politics, in the heat of which all promises and "principles" are devoured.

Glamour

That is something of which Obama is fully aware, which explains why his drive to the Presidency, from its inception through its planning to its execution was, for its single-minded cynicism, such an historically prime example of it. He and his team touted for votes on the single word Change, which was compliantly accepted as an intention to simply get rid of George Bush and as much as possible of his policies, his supporters, his command style. It was made to sound so easy. But it was hardly enough to stimulate the kind of response – the blind devotion to the concept that one man could by himself wipe out the tragedies which had plagued so many lives for all those years. Such was the degree of hysteria that it obscured the fact that in 2004 a similarly psychotic process had ensured George Bush's triumphant return to the White House. But there was more to Obama than a promise for he is the kind of politician who trades on a spurious glamour. On that score, in terms of their respective political chicanery, McCain was shrunk and exhausted, with nothing to offer in combat. Obama's lissom confidence and the support acting of his wife and children composed a portrait of the ideal American family. And in a Presidential election there are few things more seductive: "It was like a scene from a Hollywood movie" blabbered the *Observer* describing Obama and his wife dancing at one of the inaugural balls "(which) created images of fashion and celebrity to rival anything that emerged from JFK's vaunted 'Camelot'". And in case we have not seen enough of them for a while, an invitingly smiling Mrs. Obama appeared all over the cover of the next issue of *US Vogue*.

Heathrow

But the passion which greeted the emergence of the brand Obama should have had more than a

tinge of fear – which brings us back to our two London Labour MPs. At the last general election Slaughter had a majority halfway between five and six thousand, after a swing of 7.54 percent to the Tories. To complicate matters for him his predecessor in the seat was Clive Soley, once a probation officer notable as an assertive lefty in the union and, from 1997 to 2001, chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party. He left the Commons at the 2005 election, allowing himself to be created Baron Soley of Hammersmith and, to the dismay and anger of many of his admirers, become Campaign Director of Future Heathrow, which pushes unremittingly for the airport's future to be one of expansion. Living in Acton under the flight path, Soley admits that "...when I'm in my garden I have to raise my voice" but he thinks all who suffer in this way should bear it gladly for the greater profitability of British capitalism. Any embarrassment this causes Slaughter with his contrary views on Heathrow expansion are not to be dwelled upon.

Virendra Sharma won a by-election in Ealing Southall in July 2007, after the death of the sitting MP Piara Khabra (who also had an unenviable record as an inactive representative of his electorate) with a majority of 5070. Southall has a reputation as a strong Labour seat (in 1997 with a majority for Khabra of over 21,000). But since the last election the boundaries of both Sharma's and Slaughter's Ealing seats have been redrawn, the effect of which is uncertain. After ten years in power Labour is seen as outworn and sterile; many of their MPs must dream of a leader to inject some of the Obama appeal which, shallow and spurious though it is, promises to bring in the votes. But there is nobody in the Labour Party to compare in that way to the new US President. If leaders like Brown, Darling, Straw and Harman have any appeal to desperate, bewildered voters it is unlikely to be as seductive as Obama's. So Labour – including the likes of Slaughter and Sharma – are in trouble, being forced to face the reality that their time of deceiving enough voters to put them into power is probably coming to an end.

Obama's War

It did not take long for the true Obama style of government, behind the media drivell, to assert itself. Only days after he had taken office, two American drone craft killed 22 people in Pakistan and it was announced that Obama had approved the transfer of 30,000 US

troops to Afghanistan – later raised to 60,000. The war there will go on and many people will die in the interests of the minority owning class. So

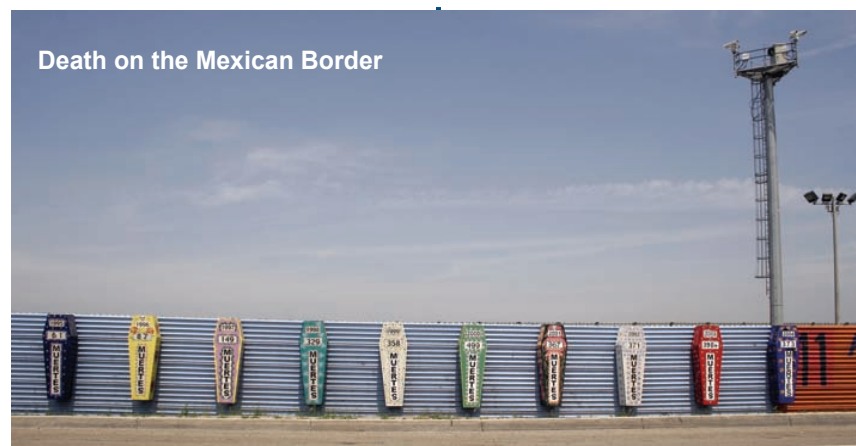
if Obama's election does have an effect on British politics, influencing the manner in which the parties here present their pleas to be allowed to run British capitalism, we can be sure that it will have nothing to do with human interests, with bettering our lives. That would be taking glamour too far.

IVAN





Voice from the Back



Death on the Mexican Border

A Wasteful Society

Capitalism is a very wasteful society that spends millions of potentially useful labour time and ingenuity in protecting private property. All over the world men and women spent their time in organisations like armies and police forces. Here is a small example of the stupidity of a private property society, in this case the border between Mexico and the USA. "18,000 - the number of Border Patrol agents assigned to it in 2008 (up from 4,000 in 1993) 705,000 - the number of people caught trying to cross it illegally in 2007/2008, down from 1.6 million in 2000. That's the equivalent to 2,000 people a day. 1,954 - the number of people who died crossing it between 1998 and 2004, mainly of exposure, drowning or car crashes." (*Times*, 16 January) Inside world socialism there will be no countries and no national borders. Everyone on Earth will be free to roam the whole world without passports or visas. There will be no border patrols, people will be free to engage in useful work.

Alternative Life Styles

Two pieces of literature came through many workers letter boxes recently. Here is one from the *Observer*, 8 February - "Prince Edward spent last week on an official visit involving lots of good works to Barbados, including lunch yesterday

at the Sandy Lane hotel (favoured by Michael Winner and Simon Cowell, with rooms costing around £3,000 per person per night) and an afternoon at the resort's golf course." Here is another from the charity *WaterAid* "Every 17 seconds, a child in the developing world dies from water-related diseases, in around the time it takes you to read this paragraph, someone, somewhere, will die. Everyday, people in the world's poorest countries face the dilemma of having to trust their health and that of their children to the consequence of drinking water that could kill them. It's a gamble that often carries a high price - seeing children needlessly dying is simply heartbreaking." *WaterAid* suggest that the answer is to send them £2 a month. Socialists suggest that we get rid of this insane society even though it might interfere with Prince Edward's £3,000 a day golfing trip.

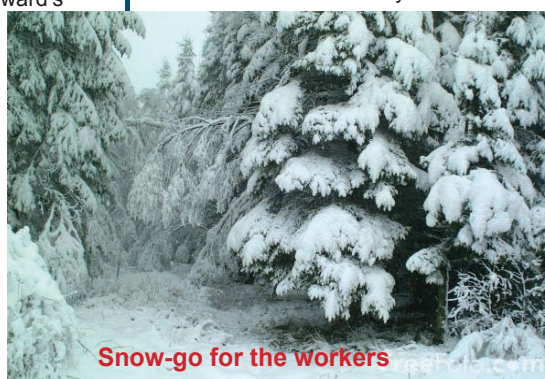
Capitalist Priorities

As unemployment soars and re-possession increase it speaks volumes for the priorities of capitalism that military expenditure keeps on rising. "The cost of Britain's military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq this financial year has soared to more than £4.5bn, an annual

increase of more than 50%, figures released yesterday reveal. Operations in southern Afghanistan accounted for a little over half, nearly £2.6bn, compared with £1.5bn last year. Most of the money was spent on providing tougher armoured vehicles for soldiers who face a growing threat of roadside bombs. Surprisingly, as the government prepares to withdraw from Basra, the cost of Britain's military presence in southern Iraq this year increased to nearly £2bn, compared with less than £1.5bn last year, according to the figures released by the Ministry of Defence. ...The defence budget will be increased by more than £500m to reach a total of just over £38bn this year, the MoD said yesterday." (*Guardian*, 13 February)

Snowfall

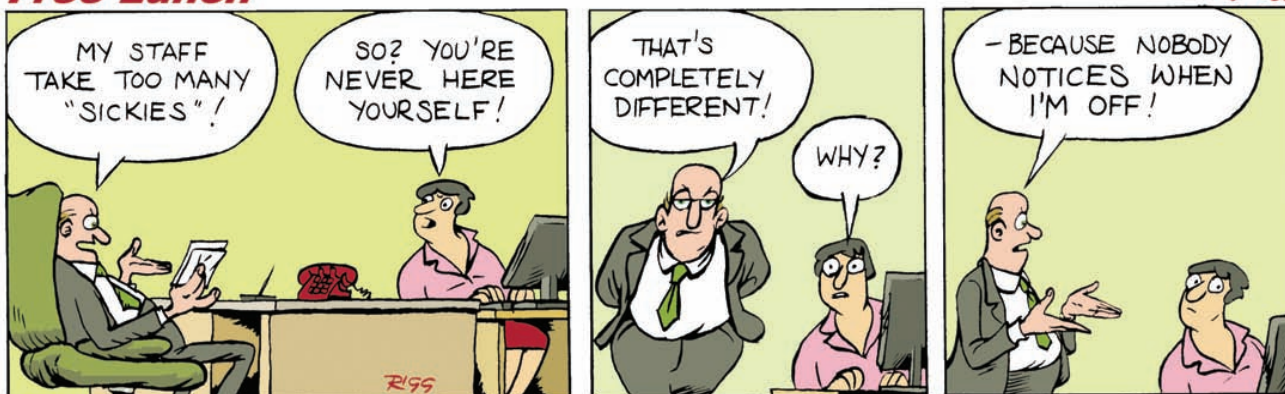
On Monday 2 February heavy snow fell in many places in Britain, and some workers failed to get to work. The British "Federation of Small Businesses estimated that continuing bad weather on Tuesday could cost the British economy more than one billion pounds", said Reuters (2 February). This is the usual news item which appears on those rare days when the weather stops industry operating normally. It just makes you wonder why, on all those ordinary, typical days throughout the year when industry is operating normally, there is nothing in the papers about the tremendous contributions to "the British economy" the workers have obviously made.



Snow-go for the workers

Free Lunch

by Rigg



socialist standard



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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

It's time to make up your mind



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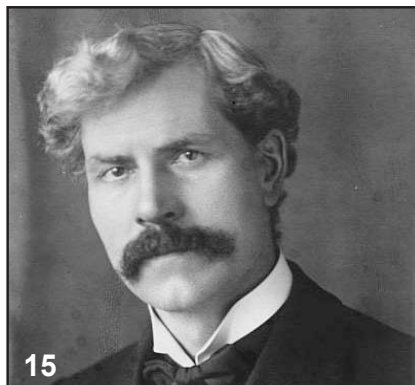
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Full employment is not the normal state of capitalism.
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 4 April** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
tel: 020 7622 3811
e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

What is socialism?

This may come as a surprise to regular readers of the *Socialist Standard*, but apparently "we are all socialists now". A claim made (incorrectly) on various occasions during the last century has resurfaced.

On both sides of the Atlantic, western-style capitalism has supposedly succumbed to a socialism of sorts. UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown is a socialist again according to some in the media, and not only the new US President Obama, but also some of the final regulatory activities of the Bush administration have been deemed in some quarters as "socialist".

The *Socialist Standard* and the World Socialist Movement have however decided not to shut up shop in triumph at this speedy success. This use of the term socialism to describe a few mild amendments to capitalism is of course just lazy thinking and sloppy journalism. It is also partially the legacy of a century of supposed revolutionaries and radicals – from V I Lenin to K Livingstone – who have viewed state control of productive resources as somehow a part of a genuine revolutionary project, and who have in the process served to confuse the case for socialism as a genuine alternative to capitalism.

The "socialism" being referred to relates then, to nothing more than the fact that governments in North America and Europe have bailed out the banks and are in the process of doing the same for the car industry and various other struggling sectors of the economy.

This attempt to position socialism as a mere version of capitalism – rather than a fundamental alternative to it – defuses it. This is why we strongly argue that these terms should be used accurately.

World socialists argue – and have done consistently for over 100 years – that nationalisation of sectors of the economy (e.g. manufacturing, mining, oil and gas extraction, power distribution, transport), or "socialisation" as it's termed in the US, is a measure used to differing degrees by every capitalist economy in the world.

Indeed, far from somehow being in some sort of contradiction with capitalism, government ownership is in reality an absolutely essential aspect of capitalism in all regions around the world. Some parts of the economy are simply too central, too important to all the other parts of the economy, for their survival to be left to chance or the vagaries of the market.

For example, during the First World War, many pubs located close to munitions factories were nationalised. This wasn't an example of early government concern with the binge-drinking menace that is currently preoccupying politicians, but was undertaken in order to enable the watering-down of the beer and other means of controlling consumption by workers in these factories, thereby minimising the risks of accidents with serious consequences for this critical industry in time of war. Left to its own devices, the market system would bite off its own (invisible) hand and happily unleash drunk workers into explosives factories.

For world socialists, socialism means a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless society. Socialism is not just a "nice idea", nor a change of name. It doesn't refer to tinkering on the margins of the profit motive, but – in contrast to the phoney ideological debate over "nationalisation" – represents a genuine alternative to capitalism.

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How scientific are scientists?

What is Andrew Marr, a well-known political commentator, doing presenting a BBC2 science programme about Darwin's 'dangerous idea'? Evidently, having used up their stock of one biologist the previous month when they trundled David Attenborough out of retirement, the BBC are now reduced to pilfering from the politics office. The first thing our ex-Presbyterian Andy does in his new role of science correspondent is issue a dire warning that we shouldn't treat Darwin as a deity or Darwinism as a religion (*The Danger of Worshipping Darwin*, BBC Online, 5 March).

Socialists have heard this sort of criticism before, from people who equate any system of organised thought with religion, in wilful disregard of the difference between organised thought and organised fantasy. Scientists do have their heroes, but they don't worship them as infallible gurus because it is recognised that argument from authority is inferior to argument from evidence. Socialists take the same view of Marx and other revolutionary thinkers.

It's a pity Marr couldn't direct his uncalled-for advice where it might do some good – at real rather than imaginary religious folly. Someone who *does* think he's an infallible guru has just lately been going round Africa telling the locals that wearing condoms will make their AIDS problem worse, not better (BBC Online, 18 March). Yes folks, the Pope pulls another blinder, advocating 'fidelity and abstinence', straight after criticising his own US division for last year's record-busting 800 sex-abuse cases, which cost the Catholic Church \$436m in 2008 (BBC Online, 14 March). Mind you, this is the guru who told us recently that Darwinian evolution is consistent with the book of Genesis.

Socialists are opposed to all religious superstitions but don't often trouble to condemn them because their advocates seem to do that better themselves. In Tanzania, the latest get-rich-quick scheme is to round up albino humans, murder them, cut them up, and sell their body parts as magic potions promising to make the owner wealthy. Meanwhile in South Africa there is an epidemic of what is called 'corrective rape', where lesbian women are gang-raped in order to make them 'girls' again. The fact that the women are often murdered afterwards suggests the rapists are not too interested in the 'corrective' aspect of it all. Unless they're thinking of the afterlife.

Someone else keen to send women to an early afterlife is

Darwin's statue at the Natural History Museum - a bit too worshipful?

Samira Jassim, aka 'the Mother of Believers', who tells us how she recruited 80 female Iraqi suicide-bombers. Her clever trick was to have the women raped by her pious and devout male assistants and then tell the victims they would never get into heaven unless they committed a 'purifying act' to expunge their 'shame'. What this shows is not only the folly of ignorant belief and the despicable manipulation that 'gurus' can exercise, but also that these 'gurus' don't believe this hokum themselves. It has often been observed that the higher one goes in any religious organisation, the less belief there is.

Perhaps, at bottom, religious people don't really believe, but they force themselves to pretend to. There are signs that this is the case. One piece of evidence was the huge outpouring of obviously genuine grief among Catholics when the last pope shuffled off his mortal coil. Since, according to doctrine, he had gone off to sit on the right hand of God and enjoy perfect bliss, one might have expected them to celebrate. But they don't, and in fact new research suggests they fight against death harder than non-believers, demanding every treatment and medication in the book, even when prolonging the agony actually increases their misery (*Pious 'fight death the hardest'*, BBC Online, 17 March). Again, this is the opposite of what you'd expect if religion was giving these people any real comfort. It seems that the Pope and his ilk aren't very keen to check out themselves, although they're often happy enough to speed other people on their way, through murder or murderously bad advice.

So how does Andrew Marr have the effrontery to equate science with religion? It seems utterly daft. But does that mean science is a noble endeavour and a paragon of value-free rationality?

One man who doesn't think so is the physicist Lee Smolin. He is scathing about the 'sociology' of the science community, which he invokes to explain why physics has languished for the last thirty years in the doldrums of unverifiable string theory rather than investigating any more promising avenues of thought: 'Good ideas are not taken seriously enough when they come from people of low status in the academic world; conversely, the ideas of high-status people are often taken too seriously' (*The Trouble With Physics*, Allen Lane, 2006). For Smolin, the old-boy culture of risk-averse conservatism is so strong that it has brought physics to a crisis where one must ask fundamental questions about what science is.

It is a shame that Smolin, following Popper, carelessly brackets 'Marxism' with witchcraft and Intelligent Design. He would be surprised to know that socialist theory (rather than the state-capitalist parodies of North Korea etc that he has in mind) actually accords very well with the principles of scientific enquiry he himself sets out, and that socialists could help to contextualise the problems besetting physics.

Smolin points out that there are more scientists working today than in the whole history of science, however he doesn't consider that many of them are doing things which are utterly useless or downright destructive because science, like any industry, has to operate within the priorities and limitations dictated by the capitalist system. He recognises that the scientific method suffers because science is organised hierarchically, but doesn't see that the same criticism can be applied to all branches of human activity. He demands democratisation and diversity in physics as if physics alone is the problem and these things are already established in other fields.

What sets science apart from religion is not that it works perfectly, but that it has the capability to be self-correcting. This is also the crucial distinction between capitalism, which is unable to correct its own suicidal blunders because it is in thrall to uncontrollable economic laws serving a powerful elite, and non-market, non-hierarchical socialism, which has no such agenda and which can therefore collectively determine the best course of action based on the available evidence.

The money system

Dear Editors

The letter by Ken Scragg and the articles by Janet Surman in your issues of December 2008 and January 2009 herald a further evolution for homo sapiens.

We are a primitive lot. Every few decades the money system collapses and we write tomes trying to explain why, but we still cling to it as if it were sacrosanct, an integral part of us. Yet it is no more than a reflection of the primitive assumption that resources are scarce, a set of symbols that are supposed to represent those resources; but symbols are not the resources themselves nor do they produce anything, only lead to the infinite complexities of marketing and exchange in which everything that we do is controlled by cost. In a moneyless system there would be only production and distribution according to demand, a simple matter in these days of instant communication.

Economists hope that the recession will end and once again be followed by boom, but there is a limit to the creation of ever-more trivia to employ us and to stimulate our greed, so that unemployment is likely to increase without limit.

The basic tenet of the capitalist system and the one over-riding impediment to social advance is the limit we impose on the quantity of money in circulation to preserve its value, so that to rid ourselves of the money system would require no more than to allow the quantity of it to increase until it lost all value, a process that, despite all our efforts to control inflation, is happening gradually all the time.

Without that impediment there would be an advance in human understanding as significant as were the development of speech or writing. Money is just a parasite.

We are very clever but by failing to distinguish between cleverness and intelligence, cause and effect, we have allowed our primitive emotions of greed, selfishness and aggression to control our intellectual and social development, leaving us struggling against each other in wars and political/economic cut-and-thrust that defeat all attempts at social advance.

Directly or indirectly all social problems, all human sufferings have their origin in the money system. There would be no arms trade, so none would be produced or promoted; and with drugs available

only on prescription we would be healthier.

Janet Surman mentioned a few of the inefficiencies and wastes of the money system, its inequalities and use of power. Its endless complexities frustrate all human endeavour. No doubt she could have gone on and on for the simple reason that nothing can be done with money that could not be done more efficiently without it. Efficiency depends upon simplicity.

MELVIN CHAPMAN, Bath

Reply: Actually, what we want is not just to abolish money but to see established a society based on the common ownership of the means of wealth production, where money would be redundant. We don't think this will happen through money gradually losing its value, as you seem to be suggesting. It will require a determined political struggle against those who currently own and control the means of production and benefit from the money-wages-profits system that is capitalism - *Editors*.

Greenpeace

Dear Editors

For what it is worth (really nothing) I have supported Greenpeace over a number of years. In response to a recent questionnaire as to what I thought of Greenpeace I said that the world's problems in my opinion could only be resolved by the dismantling of capitalism. I received a reply recommending me to have a look at the New Economics Foundation. I did this and replied as follows.

I have looked at the NEF Website and have to say that NEF is simply another reformist outfit that thinks with a little tinkering capitalism will work. On this evening's BBC 5 o'clock news mention was made that 40,000 homes having been repossessed in the current crisis - 40,000 homes lying empty. I heard Dyson (vacuum cleaners) the inventor saying that by encouraging children in schools to learn engineering Britain could reclaim some of the lost ground in manufacturing, etc. We live in a society in which goods and services are carried out solely with the aim of making a profit. People are ejected from good homes because they haven't the means to repay debt. Goods are manufactured abroad because labour is cheaper and owners can achieve more profit. These are the laws of the 'free' market economy. Oceans are poisoned because of 'cheap' disposal of waste.

Rainforests are cleared to make way for moneymaking industries. Farming, cattle raising etc. Despite the efforts of the likes of Oxfam and Greenpeace, etc the world situation is worse now than ever. People in the Third World starve not because there isn't enough food *but* because they are too poor to buy it. Think of that.

The alternative is a cooperative form of production whereby goods are produced not for profit but to meet needs. This means that ownership of the means of creating wealth, i.e. factories, land resources have to be taken away from the few who currently own them so that they become the property of all the people under democratic control.

Just think - governments are currently subsidising car manufacturers to keep people producing cars that are not needed in order to keep people in jobs. I have sympathy for the poor devils thrown out of jobs leading to all sorts of problems (loss of homes etc) but what a crazy state of affairs.

I received a reply saying that by their calculations we've only got about seven years to get on top of the problem of climate change and that the writer didn't think the change of economic system I was suggesting could be made in that sort of timetable. Maybe not, but what if the problem just cannot be solved within the present economic system? That would be seven wasted years.

PETER FINCH, Reading



The latest edition of *Imagine*, the Socialist Party of Canada's journal, is out now. Cheque or money order for £1 (including postage) to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

Antics in the South China Sea

The recent incidents in the middle of the South China Sea, in which a large American ship was “harassed” by various Chinese boats, have a comical aspect. The “harassment” seems to have been mostly a matter of uncomfortably close approaches, flag waving, and beaming lights. The most violent moment was when the Americans used fire hoses to drench the sailors on a boat that had come too close, inducing them to strip to their underwear.

These antics, however, may be the prelude to more serious conflict. An armed clash between China and the US is, perhaps, more likely to occur in the South China Sea than in the context of a putative Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

A spy ship

Many reports have described the American vessel, USNS Impeccable, as a “survey ship” or “ocean surveillance ship.” This creates the misleading impression that such ships exist for the purpose of oceanographic mapping or scientific research.

In fact, although they are unarmed and have civilian crews, the “survey ships” belong to the US navy and their function is to collect military intelligence. They are really spy ships.

The main job of the survey ship deployed in the South China Sea is to track the Chinese submarines that patrol there, operating from a base at the southern tip of Hainan Island. These are nuclear submarines carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles – that is, they constitute China’s “nuclear deterrent.” The tracking is done by means of underwater sonar arrays attached to the ship by cables. There was some attempt by Chinese sailors to sever the cables and set the arrays adrift.

It is true that USNS Impeccable, lacking armaments more powerful than fire hoses, does not by itself pose a direct threat to the submarines. But the data it collects could be passed on to another vessel equipped with anti-submarine missiles. In other words, the spy ship is a key component of anti-submarine warfare capability. It is therefore no surprise that the Chinese government should want it to leave the area.

Legalities of carve-up

It is in large part with a view to securing a sanctuary for its nuclear submarines that China asserts the right

to control most of the South China Sea, an area of some 2 million square kilometres – to turn it into a “Chinese lake.” The legal case cooked up by its diplomats involves claiming the three main archipelagos in the sea as Chinese territory and then demarcating an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) 200 miles (320 km.) wide around them as well as Hainan Island and along the shore of the mainland.

Finally, China seeks to erase the distinction between territorial waters and an EEZ. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) prohibits the presence of a spy ship in territorial waters, but not in an EEZ. The US position is that USNS Impeccable did not enter China’s territorial waters – it was 75 miles (120 km.) off the coast of Hainan at the time of the incidents – so its activity is perfectly legal.

Of course, it does not matter to us as socialists which side has the better case in terms of international law. The whole world is the common heritage of mankind, and we do not recognize the right of capitalist powers to

carve it up among themselves.

Other issues

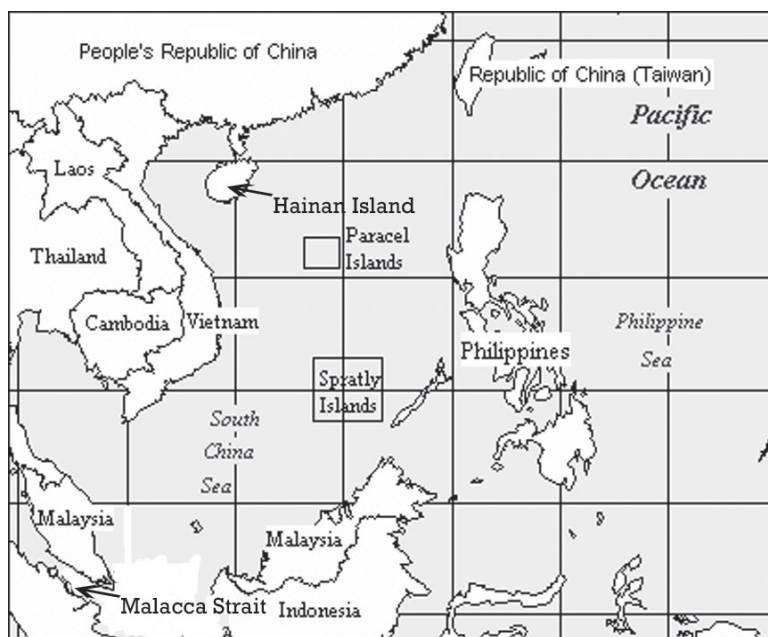
While the military issue is the direct cause of the current clash between China and the US, as it was of a similar clash involving aircraft in 1991, there are also other major issues at stake.

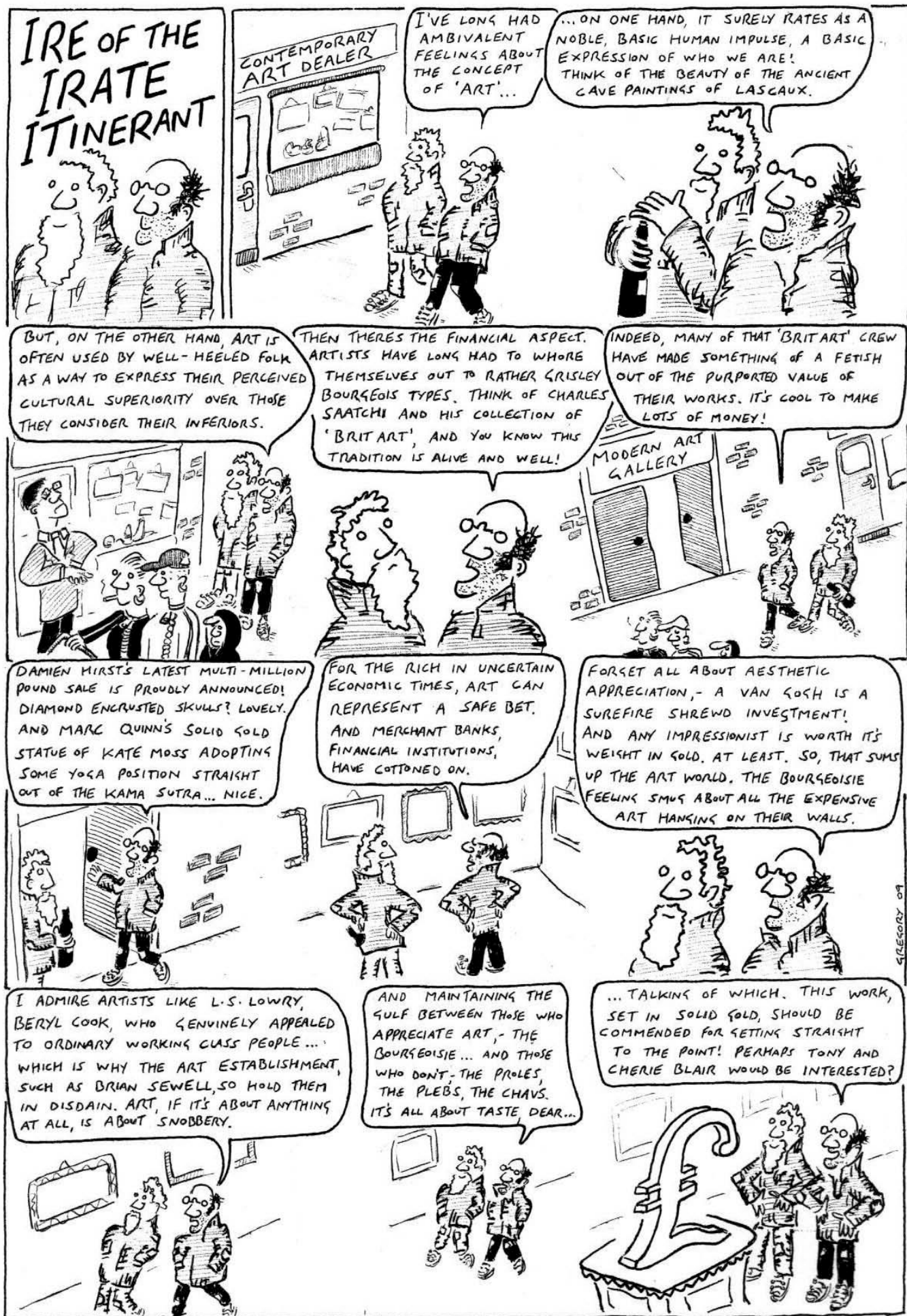
First, rights in the South China Sea are crucial to control over vital shipping lanes. The shortest route between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean

passes through the sea. This, for instance, is the route taken by tankers transporting crude oil from the Gulf to East Asia. One rationale for the US presence is to keep the sea routes open: if China were allowed strategic dominance it could close off the Malacca Strait, which connects the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean.

There are also plenty of resources to fight about in and under the sea, including valuable fishing grounds and still unexploited oil and gas fields. This is the underlying reason why it is so difficult to unravel the complicated tangle of territorial disputes over the sea and its islands among the six coastal states: China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan and the Philippines. In 1974 and 1988 these disputes led to military clashes – in both cases between China and Vietnam.

STEFAN







IT'S A MAD, MAD WORLD

"Supertankers that once raced around the world to satisfy an unquenchable thirst for oil are now parked offshore, fully loaded, anchors down, their crews killing time. In the United States, vast storage farms for oil are almost out of room. As demand for crude has plummeted, the world suddenly finds itself awash in oil that has nowhere to go. It's been less than a year since oil prices hit record highs. But now producers and traders are struggling with the new reality: The world wants less oil, not more. And turning off the spigot is about as easy as turning around one of those tankers. So oil companies and investors are stashing crude, waiting for demand to rise and the bear market to end so they can turn a profit later. Meanwhile, oil-producing countries such as Iran have pumped millions of barrels of their own crude into idle tankers, effectively taking crude off the market to halt declining prices that are devastating their economies." (*International Herald Tribune*, 3 March)

PREPARING FOR WAR?

"China is aggressively accelerating the pace of its manned space program by developing a 17,000 lb. manned military space laboratory planned for launch by late 2010. The mission will coincide with a halt in U.S. manned flight with phase-out of the shuttle. The project is being led by the General Armaments Department of the People's Liberation Army, and gives the Chinese two separate station development programs. Shenzhou 8, the first mission to the outpost in early 2011 will be flown unmanned to test robotic docking systems. Subsequent missions will be manned to utilize the new pressurized module capabilities of the Tiangong outpost. Importantly, China is openly acknowledging that the new Tiangong outpost will involve military space operations and technology development. (*Spaceflight News*, 2 March)

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

"At an exclusive soiree tomorrow evening at an upmarket London bar, an elite circle of VIPs will sprawl on velvet beds as they receive relaxing, complimentary massages. Around the corner at an equally glamorous event, guests will be entertained by circus performers and big-name DJs as they sip champagne. Most of Britain may be in cost-cutting mode as the recession worsens, but it seems that someone forgot to tell the fashion industry. London Fashion Week kicked off its 25th anniversary celebrations by popping bottles of Moët et Chandon before 10am yesterday, and fashion labels promised a weekend of opulent and expensive parties." (*Times*, 21 February)

A FREE SOCIETY?

"A jobless Taiwan man released from prison two years ago asked police to send him back so he could eat, police and local media said Tuesday, a grim sign of hard economic times on the island. When police found the 45-year-old convicted arsonist lying on a street in a popular Taipei shopping district, he requested a return to life behind bars, nostalgic for the 10 years he had already served, the China Post newspaper reported. Wang had also contacted police separately with his request, a spokesman said. Officers who found him bought him a boxed lunch but declined to send him back to prison, the police spokesman said. 'We advised him to keep looking for work,' he said. 'I don't know why he can't find a job. Maybe employers think he's not suitable or that he's too old.' Taiwan is in recession, with a slump in exports leading a record economic contraction in the fourth quarter of last year." (*Yahoo News*, 24 February)

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Saved by the slump?

WHEN THE last report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was published two years ago, we pointed out that its assumption of a "very rapid economic growth" between now and 2010, on which the more realistic of their assumptions was based, was unrealistic:

"Ironically, the only thing that may save the world from the problems that a 2.8 percent rise [in average global temperature] would cause is that the economic growth and technological innovation will not be as rapid as the IPCC report assumes. (. . .) The assumption that there will be no world economic slump or prolonged period of stagnation between now and 2100 is quite unrealistic. Given capitalism, something like this is bound to happen during this period, so that the use of fossil fuels won't be as rapid as this IPCC's scenario assumes." (*Socialist Standard*, March 2007)

We must confess that we didn't expect to be proved right so soon.

There is, however, another side to this. While the current interruption of growth is reducing energy consumption it has also made coal relatively cheaper compared to its non-CO₂-emitting alternatives, nuclear and the renewables (wind, tide, solar, etc). Not so long ago, burning coal was less profitable than burning natural gas (which gives off less CO₂) – the non-renewables don't get a look in here – but now the situation has changed:

"The margin earned from burning coal, according to Société Générale, is about €15 per megawatt hour, compared with €7 from natural gas. (. . .) At Deutsche Bank, Mark Lewis, the head of carbon research, fears that the price may have fallen to a level at which some utilities may be tempted to invest in conventional coal-fired power stations" (*Times*, 18 February).

The slump is also wreaking havoc with the EU's "carbon trading" scheme, which was touted as the market way to reduce CO₂ emissions. Under it power stations are given an allowance of how much CO₂ they can emit without being penalised. If they succeed in reducing their emissions to below this level they can sell the unused part of their allowance to other firms that want to exceed theirs. These allowances are in effect licences to pollute and a market in them was supposed to develop, and did tentatively.

What is happening now is that, with the reduction of production and so of energy consumption, power stations can easily reduce their emissions below their allowance and so have been trying to sell them. As most of them are in the same position, supply is exceeding demand and the price of these licences to pollute has collapsed. According to the *Times*, "in July a tonne of carbon sold for €35, but today it fetches less than €9". Which means, of course, that it's now cheaper to pollute.

That's the way the market works. As the current depression is confirming, the market is far from being, as taught in textbooks and proclaimed by businessmen and politicians, the most efficient way of allocating resources. The magic of the market is a myth. The madness of the market is nearer the truth.

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Banks, who needs them?

If there was production directly for use we wouldn't need banks

Are the banks and greedy and incompetent bankers to blame for the current economic crisis? That's what a lot of people think and what the media seems to want us to think. Certainly, bank directors generally are greedy – awarding themselves huge “salaries”, bonuses and pensions – and some of them are incompetent on their own terms. But blaming them is to let the real culprit off the hook: the capitalist system of production for profit.

Capitalism inevitably brings about from time to time a fall in production (despite plenty of unmet needs). Banks and bankers are no different from other capitalist enterprises and their directors. When there are profits to be made they go for them and the devil take the hindmost. In the real economy this results in overproduction relative to market demand; in the financial sector it results in the overexpansion of credit, fuelling speculative bubbles.

Both of which inevitably eventually end in tears.

Overproduction leads to cut-

backs in production, factory closures and redundancies; overexpansion of credit leads to not all loans being repaid and to bank losses and credit crunches. In fact, normally it is overproduction that brings about the contraction of credit and the pricking of speculative bubbles. Which is where we are now.

If the capitalist system of production for profit is to blame, the only way to avoid periodically-occurring crises is to get rid of it and replace it with a new and different system. But what? Socialists advocate that production be carried on purely and simply to meet people's needs. Production for use instead of production for profit, or rather, production *solely* for use since even under capitalism what is produced has to be useful (or at least seem to be useful), otherwise it wouldn't sell and there'd be no profit to be made out of arranging for it to be produced.

But before there can be production solely for use, we – society – will have to be in a position to control production, to decide what (and how and where) things are produced, and we can only do this if the places where things are produced and the materials to produce them are no longer the exclusive property of rich individuals, corporations and sovereign states. They must have become instead the common property of the whole of society. Which is not the same as state ownership, or nationalisation, as states never represent the interests of the whole of society but only of

a privileged minority within it.

Common ownership is in fact the same as no ownership. It means that nobody or no group can exercise ownership rights over any productive resource. These will simply be there, to be used to produce what people need. But how? It will simply be a question of finding some way of deciding what people want and then of arranging for this to be produced. “Simple” not because it really will be that simple, but simple compared with what has to happen today under capitalism where money – and the drive to make more money – complicates things.

The aim of production under capitalism is for those who own and control workplaces to make a monetary profit, to end up with more money than they started off with. This involves selling what has been produced and at a higher price than was paid for the resources, including the working skills of the actual producers, used in producing it. Everything has a monetary value. To calculate profits, the cost of everything bought and the income from everything sold has to be recorded. In other words, a whole superstructure of monetary accounting is imposed on the actual process of production. Banks come into it as gatherers of funds to lend to other capitalist enterprises.

Of course, with production solely for use, a record in physical quantities of the resources used in producing something will have to be kept too. But under capitalism this is duplicated by parallel

“Banks and bankers are no different from other capitalist enterprises and their directors. When there are profits to be made they go for them and the devil take the hindmost”

records of the monetary value of these quantities. In socialism, with production solely for use, this second recording will disappear, so simplifying the organisation of the production of wealth. After all, all that is needed to produce wealth are materials that originally came from nature and humans with the skills to fashion these into useful things.

Production for use

Even without money and monetary calculation it will still be necessary to co-ordinate the relations between the different workplaces. One suggestion that has been put forward by socialists is what has been called “self-regulating production for use” which, for goods and services for individual consumption, would operate on the same basis as the market is supposed to operate today.

According to economics textbooks, production today is initiated in response to how “consumers” choose to spend their money. They “vote” for what they want to be produced by what they spend their money on. Those who own and control workplaces producing particular types of consumer goods and services respond by organising the production of what people have chosen to buy. If people choose to buy more, they get their workers to produce more; if people choose to buy less, they get their workers to produce less. These workplaces producing consumer goods order the materials to produce them from other workplaces and they from their suppliers and so the initial paying demand works its way through the whole network of workplaces, through those producing machinery to mines and farms producing the original materials from nature.

Of course this ignores the fact that the money most consumers have to spend is limited by the size of their wage or salary, the total amount of which depends on how much labour those who own and control workplaces want to employ. Which depends on how much profit they think they can make by selling their product. In other words, it is the prospects for profit-making, not consumer demand, that initiates production and determines what

is produced; the level of consumer demand, and its ups and downs, is a consequence of this. But, leaving this aside, it is true that under capitalism signals as to what to produce are conveyed via the market.

With socialism, and production solely for use, the consumer really will be the start of the process leading to the production of things and services for individual consumption, only the message



Why we don't need bankers: Fred Goodwin

will be conveyed not by what they can afford to pay for but what they actually take to satisfy their needs. We can imagine that they go into a super-store as today and take off the shelves what they need. What is taken off over a given period will be recorded and transmitted to suppliers. If stocks are down, this will be a signal to produce more; if they are slow to move that would be a signal to produce less – and so on throughout the whole productive network. It will be more or less self-regulating like today except that the messages will be conveyed as required amounts only and not this and their monetary value.

This is only one suggestion as to how the production and distribution of wealth, or at least of consumer goods and services, could be organised without money. Other more directly planned arrangements would have to be made for expanding productive capacity and

infrastructure projects as well as for introducing new products.

But whatever the arrangements, with production solely for use, money will have no place. So neither will the complications that it brings to the organisation of the production of wealth. Money may make the world go round under capitalism but it also, from time to time, stops the world going round, creating unused resources alongside increased unmet needs.

With production solely for use, overproduction could still occur but only by accident (and it would be overproduction in relation to real needs, not in relation to paying demand as today) but this would not have the consequences it does today. It would not clog up production and lead to its interruption. Production in other sectors would continue as before. So would consumption since what people can consume would not be tied to working for a monetary income as today. Everybody would be able to satisfy their needs, irrespective of whether or not they were currently working, without being restricted by the amount of money they have.

No money means of course no banks either. Saving, borrowing and lending will have no more sense in a production-for-use society than buying and selling. So, what we say about the banks is not regulate them, nor nationalise them, but make them redundant. Abolish them, along with all the rest of the complicated, financial superstructure of the capitalist production-for-profit economy.

ADAM BUICK

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What is to be done?



As capitalism loses some of its legitimacy, what should those who want to get rid of capitalism be doing?

After the battle of El Alamein, Churchill famously said “This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”.

In some ways, the socialist position on the latest slump should be similar (minus, of course, the celebration of mass slaughter). Capitalism has lost its veneer of invincibility, which is much of its strength. Pundits who a couple of years ago would have referred to “the economic system” – as if there was no other – have started to refer to capitalism. And as the possibility of pensions fades out of view, job security becomes a memory (to those who ever had it), people lose their houses, their savings, we can expect a similar reaction amongst those members of our class who had previously had no cause to question their life’s trajectory within capitalism.

It is therefore imperative to use this opportunity, as capitalism’s feet of clay are broken, to build afresh rather than patch up the past. And we are building from a weak base. Across the entire spectrum of political opinion membership numbers in parties are down – the working class has been demobilised politically, and often

only ageing cadres remain, preserving political traditions rather than engaging in productive activity, recruitment and debate.

The battle of ideas

The first, most important battle is to continue the destruction of capitalism’s legitimacy in the minds of our fellow class members. That is, to drive the development of our class as a class-for-itself, mindful of the fact that capitalism is a thing that can be destroyed and a thing that *should* be destroyed. As it rapidly crumbles from a high peak to a lower base, most workers “shouldn’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows”, as the song has it.

The second is to develop an effective medium of engagement between workers and politics. A great deal of energy has been expended on this topic in the past, mainly because all political parties which lose membership will, understandably, see this as an institutional failing. This is frankly hubris. For an organisation to think that it is *capable* of single-handedly failing the working class is to reject the materialist approach, that our ideas come from our life

circumstances and not from an all-knowing vanguard. This medium of engagement has to take account of society's development; open-air meetings at Hyde Park, for example, may be superseded by Second Life. The only way to establish this is to explore all avenues and reinforce those that work, while remaining confident in the class's revolutionary potential.

The third is to ensure that the right ideas for the working class win out, and constitute the basis for the overall class struggle. Historically this battle of ideas has been waged both in the mind – in debates, lectures and social events – and on the streets. We of course favour the first approach, and do all we can to keep activity there. This is not just a matter of aesthetics. All of capitalism's power, including its coercive power, is in the hands of the working class; fighting can only firstly divide us and secondly weaken us.

Capitalism digs its own grave

While socialists have few resources, capitalism's own failings have far more reach and power to convince our class of the folly of capitalism than we possess – the largest organisations claiming to be revolutionary may just about win a couple of column inches with a large demonstration, as opposed to daily front page news of corruption, failure and despair from the mainstream press. Capitalism will provide its own gravediggers. Existing organisations can at best address points two and three above – re-establish a mass political culture amongst our class, whilst engaging in debate between the various political traditions and throwing the matter open to our class, that the best ideas win in terms of membership.

This also determines the level of cooperation between these traditions. All, presumably, want a climate in which working class ideas can flourish. Though some may be powerful enough to have their own mass papers, in practice preaching is only to the converted.

Authoritarian parties are hostile at the second level: rather than defending their own ideas, they create their own political ghettos, such as the old Communist parties which denigrated and suppressed their opposition so as not to compete (and fail) at the level of demonstrating the relative values of their ideas. This is where streetfighting plays its role: physically removing opposition that one cannot overcome in a battle of hearts and minds, whilst destroying the climate in which the working class can find its way. The revolution is aborted in the process, not defended. This is another reason why a socialist revolution must be peaceful, at least as far as our class is concerned.

By contrast, a genuine revolutionary party in capitalism is, by definition, a party of the working class. A depoliticised working class *cannot* make a socialist revolution. It must be a party that operates at the level of discussion between workers, not so as to fetishise a particular political form but because a successful socialist revolution is made by the working class coming to revolutionary ideas.

Let's have a party

This brings us to defending our own political tradition. We are a party of the third part, so to speak: we focus on debate between traditions, engaging workers in the process, whilst maintaining the medium (finding out how people engage in politics, making the process a positive one). Even if we had the power to affect the news, we would have no need to engage in 'propaganda' in its pejorative sense; the simple facts damn capitalism amply enough, and it is enough to shout these facts from

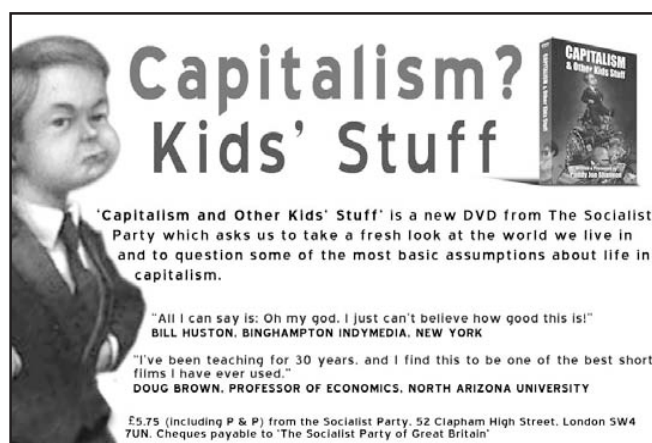
the rooftops along with our call to action.

We focus our differences at the level of ideas. Front organisations are only organisations that suppress debate and engage in conflict at a lower level. Classic cases are the recent Socialist Alliance, and Respect, coalitions which have been the means for various Left traditions to draw working class support together, all to then vie with each other to recruit for members within this pool. Only in such an environment could one use the word 'comrade' to refer to an organisational enemy. The *Weekly Worker* often carries records of physical ejections from meetings, even beatings, amongst these supposed comrades. The working class is profoundly deterred by these antics; perhaps more importantly, the idea that workers can never attain more than "trade union consciousness" is made self-fulfilling by denying debate.

The coming months and years will see many organisations, calling themselves working class, trying to establish or re-establish themselves. Calls will be made to support this or that country, this or that leader, this or that party. There is a simple way to negotiate this maze: those that do all they can to make space for the working class themselves to become revolutionary, are revolutionary: all others are impostors. The object must be nothing short of a society that has the liberation of our class from capitalism as its precondition: the abolition of wage slavery. We have the power to do this if we are confident and not distracted. We as a class must be trusted with our own decisions, and credited with the ability to know our own interests. And there should be no preaching of violence within the class; we fail when our energies turn against each other. In effect, this means that the revolution should be as peaceful as possible; all those who now bear arms are workers like ourselves, and history has shown how unwilling workers can be to fire on each other unless backed into a corner. But we should be hostile to all those who try to sow defeatism amongst our class, doubt our revolutionary ability or ability to organise ourselves, who attempt to turn our energies to their own ends.

We have, of course, more to say than this. Lessons from history that have been learned, the writings of past revolutionaries, and more. But these things are a touchstone to avoid the errors of the past: the revolution should be for the class and by the class, together as comrades. We may not, this time, end capitalism. But we can sense the beginning of the end; and get going a political party with socialism as its objective, not small reforms but the overthrow of capitalism – that is the end of the beginning.

SJW



Northern Ireland: a return to violence?

Violence will not make people into socialists

Two British soldiers shot dead at Masserene Barracks in Northern Ireland, and a policeman shot dead in Craigavon, by dissident Republicans who want to re-draw the present political frontiers. Instead of dividing the six counties from the rest of Ireland, the frontier (they demand) should be moved and instead divide Ireland from the somewhat larger island to the east, containing the capitalist entity known as Great Britain. But socialists do not want to re-draw any frontiers: they want to abolish frontiers. Frontiers are entirely artificial boundaries, whether by land or sea. All a frontier does is to mark out one bit of the Earth's surface where one ruling class has power from the next bit of the Earth's surface where another ruling class has power. Since socialism would put an end to the ruling class of every state, frontiers would cease to have any meaning, and would therefore cease to exist.

No violence, no death or injury, will bring socialism any closer. Socialism will be brought about when the great majority of the world's people want it to be brought about. We want to change people's ideas. Violence will not make people into Socialists.

Banging a cudgel down on someone's head is not going to alter the

ideas inside that head, at least in any worthwhile way. Rational discussion will finally make Socialists. We believe that by considered argument we can show how co-operation and mutual assistance will achieve what we all want to achieve – a peaceful, harmonious, and contented existence. Violence we leave to others.

People who support a capitalist state, people who support a capitalist party, are led remorselessly into supporting violence. But it is interesting how often politicians

“People who support a capitalist state, people who support a capitalist party, are led remorselessly into supporting violence”

and journalists who steadfastly support violence when it comes from what they think is “their own” side, nevertheless quickly explode with anger when it comes from someone else. One columnist on the *Times*, David Aaronovitch, champions Israel against the Palestinians; he therefore has had to write torrents of words trying to show that the deaths of well over a thousand men women and children in Gaza, killed by Israeli bullets and bombs, are excusable, because it is only in retaliation for the Israeli civilians killed the rockets fired by Palestinian militias. He also supported the invasion of Iraq by the Americans and the

British. So he has had to write more floods of words defending the deaths of some hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, as well as many British and American soldiers, because all that was merely a by-product of getting rid of Saddam Hussein, a brutal dictator who was hostile to the Americans. (Let's not mention all those brutal dictators friendly to the Americans, who the Americans have propped up.) It's hard to say how many Iraqis have died, of course. As the American general who led the attack on Iraq said about Iraqi casualties, “We don't do body counts” (though American casualties were reported with great care). But the lowest figure that the most dedicated warmonger has come up with is 100,000. Other people have said the number of violent deaths since the invasion is 600,000 – some contend that the true figure is a million. And that is not counting all the other hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians who have been injured, but have survived, all the maimed and the handicapped, all those who will never walk again, all those who will never see again. The boy whose whole family was killed, and both of whose arms were blown off by a bomb, was still alive, so did not himself add to the total of deaths. Never mind! If you support one capitalist state against the other capitalist states, supporting violence is what you have to do: and that is what this columnist has had to do.

After writing reams of comment justifying the deaths, the injuries, and the destruction in Gaza and in Iraq, and no doubt having felt very uncomfortable having been forced, by his political beliefs, to do it, he has leapt with avidity on the deaths of the two British soldiers in Northern Ireland. (He wrote his column before the death of the Craigavon policeman.) Now, at last, he obviously feels, he can be on the side of the angels (*Times*, 10 March).

The Belfast 'Peace Line'. Socialists don't want to re-draw frontiers: they want to abolish them.

The two deaths are “terrorism”, and a return to “the ‘armed struggle’” which is only “a euphemism for strolling up behind someone and blasting their brains out all over their children”. He poured scorn on the idea that any “grievance” that “springs from real social and political conditions” can ever justify such “an act of terror”. The suggestion that the shooting might be revenge for the recent re-introduction into Northern Ireland of “army intelligence” operators, or perhaps “spies” as some might call them, led to an eruption of anger on the columnist’s part. “Rubbish. Really, absolute rubbish.” This action merely shows that “violent republicanism is back in a new, potent, death-dealing guise”, a “return to killing in Ulster”. This is merely “the first atrocity in a desired new cycle of attacks, arrests, martyrdoms . . . and crying children”. Those supporting the killing are merely “unattractive men with bald heads and pallid skin”, who “imagine themselves to be Wolfe Tone or James Connolly reborn”, or else “middle-aged matrons, brought up in the purple of Republicanism, but now with roots showing through the dye”. Any supposed “grievance comes second. The desire to hate and kill comes first, and then grubs around in the shit for its excuse.” Strange to think that in 1798 Wolfe Tone, and in 1916 James Connolly, would have been the target for similar attacks by writers in the respectable newspapers, though perhaps this writer has broken new ground with his scatological language, and his fevered imaginings about the supposed physical unattractiveness of his opponents.

The shootings at Masserene Barracks and at Craigavon were indefensible, the deaths were indefensible, the motive (the redrawing of capitalism’s frontiers) was indefensible. But how a man can write many pages justifying the deaths of half a million or more, and then work himself up into a rage of furious indignation over the deaths of two, defies any rational explanation. People who oppose all violence, all killing, are at least being consistent: but people who support capitalism, who support this or that capitalist state, will find that they are defending violence, and defending killing, whether they want to or not. So they cannot help sounding hypocritical when they then jump over the fence and try to denounce violence.

ALWYN EDGAR

Capitalism’s reserve army of labour

Full employment is not the normal state of capitalism

When Ramsay MacDonald’s second Labour government came to power in 1929, unemployment had been at a steady 10 percent of the working population for several years, around 1 million. Within a year, the effect of the Great Depression was to send unemployment rocketing to 2.5 million, causing the collapse of that second Labour attempt to reform capitalism.

MacDonald held steadfastly to classical economic views. He frowned on the dole as a cause of indolence and unemployment, and believed that equilibrium in the jobs market could be found. That is, full employment will come if barriers to wages finding their “natural” level are removed. He was, thus, content to agree to the May Report which included cutting the dole to those two and a half million, in order to balance the government’s budget. That was the move that caused his government to collapse, and for MacDonald to go down in Labour Party history as the great traitor, as he jumped ship to form the National Government.

Manifestly, this did not work, and unemployment remained steadfastly high. Dole or low dole, workers were simply unable to find jobs because the capitalists of the time held steadfastly to their principle of “no profit, no employment”. Their mistake had been to cling to

the myth, exploded by Karl Marx more than 60 years before, that full employment is the normal state of capitalism, and unemployment the exception.

Entirely to the contrary, Marx demonstrated that not only was a pool of unemployed workers the norm under capitalism, it was in fact intrinsic and essential to the workings of the wages system for there to be such a pool. He referred to it was the “industrial reserve army”. For Marx, the relative size of this reserve had a direct effect on the level of wages – as it increased, wages shrank, and vice versa. The upward limit of wages was the point at which they began to unduly impact on profitability. High wages would lead employers to either discover labour-saving processes, or simply lay off staff and cut back operations.

This indicates how the industrial reserve army works both ways. Economic historians attribute the rise of the United States as an economic and industrial power house to the relative scarcity of skilled labour in the nineteenth century (exacerbated by the fact that workers could strike out to find frontier land, rather than accept unemployment). This compelled American capitalists to improve the intensive exploitation of their capital in order to be able to effectively use the labour resources to hand. That is, that capital has an



Unemployed workers queue for work, New York City, 1933

incentive in not letting the reserve army get too large.

Another feature of Marx' theory was that the unemployment is not a function of population. That is, it is not simply growth in the number of mouths to feed that causes unemployment, but that it is a wholly determined variable based on the state of the investment of capital. As more capital is brought into play, so too is more labour. Unemployment is a relative phenomena based simply on the ratio of employees to those seeking work. This can clearly be seen in UK statistics. In 1900 the population was around 38 million, and unemployment stood at around 5 percent, at the end of the Twentieth Century the population was close to 60 million, and unemployment was still only around 5 percent, its changes do not track population growth..

People can be taken out of this reserve army. For example, in the 1960's Harold Wilson's Labour government had to seriously debate whether the country could afford to raise the school leaving age to 16, drawing all those young workers out of the labour force at a time of nearly full employment. Nowadays, under the current Labour administration, they have a policy of keeping at least half of school leavers in full time education until they are 21. Many commentators have noted that incapacity benefit has become prevalent in areas of large stagnant unemployment over the years. That, and the dole, allow some sections of the workforce to become economically inactive, and thus no longer contributing to the labour pool and the reserve army.

Interestingly, the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics in the UK suggests that as times become more straightened, these economically inactive people are entering the labour market. At the same time, underemployment has grown. People are working fewer hours (and thus making less money) in order to retain some sort of employment. Although they are not unemployed, they are part of the reserve army, in as much as many of them would, if they could, convert to full time work if it was available.

The latest figures, for January, show that unemployment in Britain has now passed the 2 million mark. Although in absolute terms those numbers are similar to the level of unemployment that destroyed MacDonald, because the total and working populations have increased it is not yet as drastic. Those figures, though, only represent a return to the levels of the late 1990's. Indeed, in the Thatcher years, figures of nearly three and a half million were seen (and that resulted in collective bargaining by riot in some particularly hard hit areas). It should also be noted, though, that national figures vary regionally, and poor areas, like inner city London, the North East and Glasgow, say, already had higher than national average unemployment, and are likely to be more swiftly affected by the current rises than elsewhere.

One new aspect of the current round of unemployment is the role of EU migrant labour. As a highly mobile workforce with little by way of invested roots, it may well soak up some of the costs while leaving the resident workforce of the UK less hard hit, although the figures above seem to indicate, so far, otherwise. Indeed, British citizens are emigrating less, and this off-sets any trend. In the days of the Empire, one way of regulating the reserve army of labour was emigration, and it seems the EU fulfils a similar role today. That said, unemployment is uneven across the EU, and is itself growing.

PIK SMEET



Capitalism is working

The *Times* (9 March) carried an article by Eamonn Butler, the director of the Adam Smith Institute. Yes, they are still around, even if it might be thought that they would be keeping a low profile these days, given that the pursuit of profit has yet again led to overproduction and a financial and economic crisis, a really big one this time.

Butler began by quoting a speech by an American professor called Boettke at a recent gathering of Mad Marketeers in New York:

"If you bound the arms and legs of gold-medal swimmer Michael Phelps, weighed him down with chains, threw him in a pool and he sank, you wouldn't call it a 'failure of swimming'. So, when markets have been weighted down by inept and excessive regulation, why call this a 'failure of capitalism'?"

That depends on what you mean by capitalism. Boettke seems to mean the spontaneous operation of production for profit and the market. But that's not really capitalism; it's just a policy that some capitalists (and their paid and unpaid publicists) have favoured at some times.

Capitalism is a system of production for sale on a market with a view to profit. Ideologists such as Butler and Boettke are assuming that there is some irreconcilable conflict between the profit system and government intervention. But there isn't. Capitalism has never existed without government intervention and never will. For a start, it is based on the exclusion of the majority from the ownership and control of the means of production, which are monopolised by a profit-seeking minority. A state is needed to maintain this exclusion. This has to be paid for, so taxes have to be levied. Capitalists in one country are in competition with capitalists from other countries, and governments have always intervened to help "their" capitalists with tariffs and subsidies and, if need be, by military action.

So, capitalism and the state are not incompatible. They go together. What is true is that the consensus of capitalist opinion varies at times as to the desirable degree of government intervention. What seems to be annoying the Adam Smith Institute today is that their ideological rivals, the Keynesians, who have no qualms about government intervention in the capitalist economy, are making a come-back because of the present crisis.

"Up to now", Butler wrote, "the Keynesians have made the running. Greed, they say, has brought down the world economy. Only massive public spending can revive it". If by "greed" Butler means the pursuit of profits, the Keynesians are not against that, even if they certainly are in favour of trying to spend the way of the crisis. But that's just an alternative policy for the profit system to the one favoured by the Adam Smith Institute. It's not a negation of capitalism.

Butler proffers his own explanation for the crisis: "excessive regulation" (of course). This assumes that, without this, the crisis would not have occurred. He rather undermines this approach by concluding his article by saying that "occasional crises are the cost of the prosperity that entrepreneurial capitalism brings".

So, crises are going to occur anyway, even in his ideal, unregulated capitalist world! And what, without excessive regulation to blame, would they be caused by if not by the pursuit of profits leading to overproduction in some sector in relation to the market, from which the only way out is a crisis to eliminate the lame ducks and the deadwood, as capitalists like to refer to their inefficient colleagues? In this sense, Boettke is right. This and other crises don't represent the "failure of capitalism", but capitalism working normally.



Food: commodity or need?

Enough calories are already produced in the world today to avoid anyone having to starve. It's just that millions can't afford to buy the food containing them.

Air, water, food; the three essential requirements of life. Humans can survive for barely 2-3 minutes without air, several days without water and at most a few weeks without food. In our earliest days all were born with totally free access to these most basic necessities of life – access as required. Now we still have free air, if of questionable quality, although it is possible to buy a refreshing booster session of pure, clean oxygen in such cities as Tokyo. Water is still freely available to some – an ever-shrinking number – although many of these have to manage with a contaminated or disease-ridden supply, daily risking serious illness or even death. It has become a commodity denied to many, a basic requirement of life withheld, leading to aggressive acts in local, national and international arenas. Food, like water, finds those at the end of the supply chain, those who *need* the commodity rather than those who desire the profit, are the least likely to be consulted regarding the supply.

According to T. Lang in *The Ecologist* (March 2008) food is a \$6.4 trillion-a-year economy, selling a necessity of life, which impoverishes more people than any other sector. There has to be a moral conundrum here if some of us are reduced to a daily recurring position of no money, no meal. .

The discussion as to whether the world does or can produce enough food for the current population is generally heard through the loudspeaker of the economic/political sector which suggests that overpopulation is the problem. However, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's figures for 2006 there are enough calories for everyone even in most of the poorer countries, pointing to the fact that hunger is simply a problem of the barriers to distribution.

For example, in India between 2001-3 where

20 percent of the population (212 million) were undernourished there were 2440 available calories per person per day.

Another example is that in Ethiopia in 2001-3 with 46 percent of the population (31.5 million) undernourished there were 1860 available calories per person per day.

So, if enough food to feed domestic populations is available, why do so many have to go without and where does the surplus go? Lack of money is the answer to the first part and export to the second. Remember the Irish 'potato' famine when thousands upon thousands died of starvation as a result of potato blight decimating the crops of the indigenous population? Food was not scarce, there was plenty of production of food for export and for the wealthy but beyond the means of the local poor whose staple diet was potatoes. What's different but the century, the geographical location and the sheer scale of the iniquity of the market? The "market" – as if this were a lifeless entity with no human input. The market – in control or out of control, controlling or controlled – can have no moral or ethical standards for these are human qualities to be included or discounted at the decision-making, policy-making processes.

The export of food from the South on a grand scale is part of what leaves millions undernourished but export is a two-way process. The North also exports food to the South, highly subsidised food which makes it untenable for farmers in the importing country to compete, forcing them to switch to crops for export or go out of business. Thus the cycle continues. More impoverishment. More hunger. A glance at the 2008 subsidy figures of the US reveals \$50+ billion given in particular to export crops. In diminishing order, corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans, rice, sorghum, barley, peanuts. Absent from the subsidy list are fruit and vegetables and crops grown for local US markets.

One of the legacies of the colonisation of the South by the North has been the imposition of methods of farming along with the types of crops to be grown. Huge areas of previously diverse multi-crop forests were reduced to plantations growing single crops specifically for export – bananas, sugar cane, pineapples – decimating the land through soil erosion from this unsuitable method

of farming and taking away the land and livelihood of local peasants. The heavy-handed, arrogant approach of incomers showing no regard for centuries old successful sustainable methods of farming.

Reinforcing food's place as a commodity rather than a right to a need is the way decisions are made by transnational corporations with respect to environmental consequences. The North's subsidised food puts populations in poor countries off their lands and into urban environments where they then work in manufacturing; manufacturing that has been exported there for their cheap labour. A World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 reported that transferring manufacturing to the South was the same as exporting pollution. Lawrence Summers, when at the World Bank (he's now Obama's chief economic adviser), put his name to a document which only half-jokingly suggested that exporting pollution to the poorer countries was a good idea financially on another count – people in those countries died younger anyway from other diseases and we would be saving on our own pollution clean-ups and health-care bills by so doing. Had Southern pollution control met minimal Northern standards the annual bill would have been \$14.2 billion more. In other words, make it impossible for peasant farmers to compete with your highly subsidised food crops, watch them migrate to cities where they can no longer even grow food for themselves and employ them cheaply in polluting manufacturing jobs producing goods for export back to you.

"You are what you eat" or "Food is Life" may be seen as mantras of diet-obsessed wacky people but on a science-based, physiological level they happen to be true. To be effectively nourished and maintain decent health requires an adequate supply in reasonable balance of

carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, minerals and fibre. Fresh, whole foods, uncontaminated by polluted air and water or dozens of chemical sprays and manufactured additives. More and more studies contradict the conventional view of the industrial agricultural complex, generally upheld by politicians, which pushes farming on a huge scale and uses manufactured fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides, hormones and genetically modified seed, promoting the idea that bigger is better. It may yield more profit but that is about all. Outside the industrial agricultural complex it is recognised that organic methods are more favourable to producers, soil, sustainability of the environment and to the consumers. A 2007 report from the University of Michigan said that an organic world could yield over 2,641 calories per person per day and that small farms are the most productive. This could be interpreted that food viewed as a need rather than a commodity is a viable prospect and enough could be available for all when the requirement for profit is removed. Unfortunately, as yet, this is a disparate group of movements and pressure groups worldwide which has far from the political clout of the entrenched industrial agricultural complex and transnational corporations' lobby which leaves us with the obvious conclusion that the *only* solution is the urgent dismantling of the system of commodities in favour of one of free access for all.

(References from Wayne Roberts' "The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food" – one of a series from *New Internationalist*).

JANET SURMAN

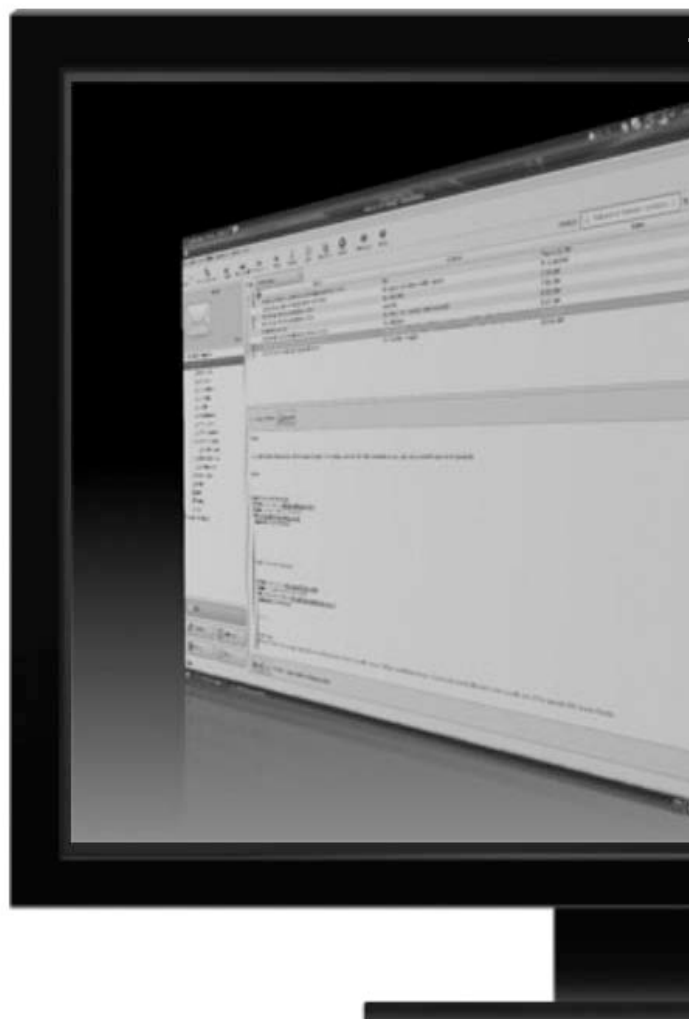
Socialism: an open source society

A socialist describes his personal experience of open source software - and its socialist implications.

A little over a year ago I started to use something in my daily life "that'll never work" because "it's human nature, mate"; "No such thing as something for nothing, a free lunch"; "People don't work for pleasure, you know, they only work because they have to or to make money". Yet here I am, totally chuffed with this thing that is so opposed to much of the preconceived notion of "Human Nature" and the ways of this wicked world that it can't possibly exist let alone bring some pretty unbridled pleasure to this 65 year-old anorak.

Any idea what I'm talking about?

Here're some more clues. Thousands of people enthusiastically cooperate on thousands of collaborative, inter-related projects that bring new "products to market" whilst constantly upgrading and improving existing core "products". Many of those people work for little or no financial gain, indeed,



some have worked to the deficit of their own financial situations. They don't just collaborate in "the office", they collaborate across the borders of nation states, religious divides and the apartheid walls of economics and race; Russian with Chechen, Iranian with American, Palestinian with Israeli . . . they do it without seeking permission from priest or politician. They do it to fulfill a passion for the skill and knowledge they bring to the work they do and a shared ideal of bringing the very best in computer operating systems and software to the ordinary people of this world . . . free!

I'm talking about Linux based Open Source and Ubuntu in particular. Ubuntu is an ancient African word that means "humanity to others".

Based on personal experience, there isn't a better or more "socialist" way to do your computing. You can download the whole caboodle if you have the wherewithal free of charge or do as I did and order an installation disc which is also free. And free really means free, Ubuntu is shipped to anywhere in the world post free . . . you're free, and even encouraged, to make copies and give them away . . . as long as they're free!

Installation is seamless and painless; upgrading is seamless and painless. All of the basic programs you could need and a few more beside are pre-installed, all are Open Source and free (of course) and because they are created by enthusiasts they are fully featured, look attractive and work.

So, now you're up and running and you want a few extra trinkets to handle all those quirky things many of us like to do with our computers. Things like doctoring perfectly normal snapshots so that they look like something from the crazed world of Dali or personalising our "desktops" (something I'm convinced goes back to school desks, penknives and being summoned

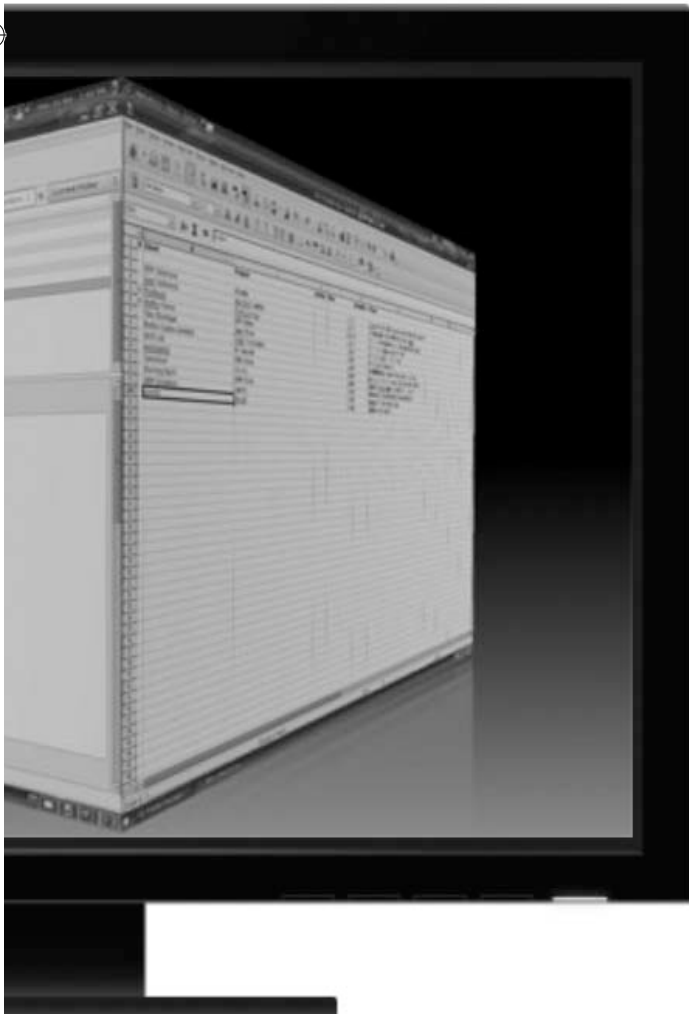
forward for institutionalised ritual humiliation). With Ubuntu there's no digging out those CDs you've saved for years from computer mags to see if there are any freebies that'll maybe come close to meeting your particular fantasies . . . you just click on "Add/Remove Programs" and browse through what seems like thousands of programs in various categories. Each has been created by an individual or team that loves computing and has poured their passion into making each offering the best it can be. Better still, from the average user's perspective, everything is, yes, you guessed it, free.

I suppose I'm a bit like a new convert or a former smoker, on the one hand full of enthusiasm for the new "reality" and on the other filled with scorn for what had gone before. The enthusiasm is not without foundation; Ubuntu claims to "work out of the box" and it does just that – perfectly. There are no annoying screens telling you that you *have* to register this or that, no registration keys to be pasted in, no time limitations before you have to pay up and no intrusive demands for personal information or email addresses so you can be deluged with stuff you don't need or want. Under Ubuntu my computer "talks" to all of my cameras and cards without recourse to specialised programs, something it never did under Windows and my "Photo Shop" type program is as beautiful on the eye and as functional as the one that ships with Mac. Programs install and uninstall without leaving behind digital detritus to slow or crash the system and such is the make up of Ubuntu that it is simply not open to outside attacks by virus, root-kit and much else in the way that Windows is. It's like taking a cool shower on a hot day . . . so refreshing! How can something so good be free? I mean, it's not the way of the world, is it? It's not human nature to do something for nothing, is it? Without "market forces" quality goes down the drain and mediocrity becomes the norm, doesn't it?

Look at Microsoft; based on size of usage they must be the world's standard. I've used their products for years in many different incarnations. They've built their fortune off my back . . . have you checked lately what one of their products costs? And not just them. I've lost count of the number of programs I've paid for to try and improve or protect their bloated, worm-holed operating system from all the nasties out there in cyber-space only to dump them a few months or years down the road. Or worse still have them destroy my set-up and data that I should have backed-up but had put off yet again! Been there? Hey! That's the way it is in this techno-corner of the capitalist world, let the buyer beware; you pays your money and takes your choice. Not any more, comrades. There really is a better way out there and it's called Open Source, it has superior "products" and an ethos that we can each embrace. Computing for human beings.

Is this beginning to sound like a promo for a socialist computing Utopia? Or is it a preview of how the world really ought to be? Much of Open Source is at the real cutting edge of technical development; a huge percentage of the servers around the world, machines that run those multi-national companies and the Internet run on Linux based software. They pay a lot of money for that privilege, money that keeps Open Source afloat and enables we plebs and peons to receive our free CDs mailed free of charge, to freely download free applications and freely make use of this wonderful working example of human co-operation. In fact, every individual user of Ubuntu is encouraged to join the community and contribute in any way they can, from translations to critique to ideas to programming skills; use what you need and contribute what you can . . . where have we heard that before? Next time someone throws "human nature" in your face or tells you that socialism will never work offer up Open Source as proof that human beings are better co-operators and contributors than many give them credit for.

ALAN FENN



Socialist Party Merchandise

Teeshirts:

Blue with polar bear and 'If you were a polar bear, you'd be a socialist' plus party website address.

Yellow, with blue and green globe 'The world is a treasury for all' plus party web site address on. Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL.

Mugs:

One style:

'Duet' - Red and white with 'Only sheep need leaders' (pictured)

and website, with "Famine? War? Pollution? Capitalism is the Problem. World Socialism s the Solution" and party telephone number.



Pens:

Blue and white, with blue ink 'Only sheep need leaders' and a sheep plus party website. Red and white, with blue ink 'Workers of the world unite' plus party website Black with black ink. 'Only sheep need leaders' and a sheep plus party website.

Baseball caps:

navy blue, with embroidered "World Socialist Movement" on.

Balloons:

different colours, with "World Socialist Movement".

Prices:

Tee shirts £7.00 each (**state size when ordering**). Mugs £5.00 each. Pens £0.50 each. Baseball caps £5.00 each. Balloons 15p each.

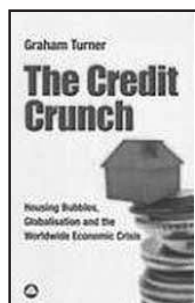
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£2.50 for the first £10 and then £1.50 for subsequent £10 worths or part thereof. Please send cheque or postal order (no cash) made payable to SPGB SW Regional Branch, c/o Veronica Clanchy, FAO: South West Regional Branch, 42 Winifred Road, Poole, Dorset. BH15 3PU. Any queries, please phone 01202 569826. Please include own phone number or other contact details.

Book Reviews

A deficit of logic

The Credit Crunch. Graham Turner. 2008. Pluto Press.



Graham Turner has made a number of appearances on BBC2's *Newsnight* in recent weeks, helping Paul Mason deconstruct the credit crisis and slump.

Turner is a Keynesian of sorts and a fan of 'quantitative easing' i.e. of central banks flooding the financial markets with liquidity in the hope that this will get banks lending again, literally giving people more money to spend. As history demonstrates though – and Marxian economics explains – the practical effect of this is further doses of currency inflation as it is likely to accelerate the continuing overissue of inconvertible paper currency that has been going on since the Second World War.

This book is currently one of the most widely available explanations of the financial crisis in UK bookshops. But in essence it is a confused book and Turner seems to think that the reason the Keynesian remedy hasn't worked on any previous occasion is because the policy levers weren't pulled in quite the right order, or at quite the right time.

As an illustration of the book's confusion, there are a large number of pages discussing in great detail what Turner apparently sees as the supposed significance of trade deficits and surpluses in various countries affected by the asset price bubble. But then he concludes, all of a sudden and for no particular or stated reason – much in line with the historical evidence but against the line of his own argument presented here – that 'It does not matter that much whether a country is running a trade deficit or a surplus: a bubble is a bubble, and there are far too many around'. Indeed.

Though it includes some interesting and useful statistical data and graphs, after this point it was difficult to take the book entirely seriously and George Cooper's rival explanation in the *Origin of Financial Crises* (reviewed in March) is clearer, more in accordance with reality and much to be preferred.

DAP

Capitalist childhood

A Good Childhood: Searching for values in a competitive age. Richard Lazard and Judy Dunn. Penguin, £9.99. 2009.

Some of us have a good childhood; others don't. Of course it all depends on what you mean by a good childhood. Is it to own a lot of things – or to be happy? Is it more important to have a good relationship with others – or with yourself?

This book is based on the report of an 18-month survey sponsored by the Children's Society, and is written by an economist and a psychologist. It deals with a wide range of issues connected with childhood: family, friends, lifestyle, values, schooling, mental health and inequalities. Its centre-left viewpoint is well illustrated by the remark "With immense courage the Labour government committed itself in 1999 to abolishing child poverty by 2020..."

The authors are critical of excessive individualism, by which they mean "the belief that the prime duty of the individual is to make the most of her life, rather than contribute to the good of others". They reject some features of the face of childhood in present society, but they want to scrub that face clean rather than remodel it. Thus the media "should be embarrassed at the amount of physical violence which they put out and advertisers should be embarrassed at their encouragement of premature sexualization, heavy drinking and over-eating". No question of the media and advertisers stopping their malign and profit-seeking influence on youngsters—just suggest that they should feel embarrassed at what they do.

The authors are far from holding the view that there is no such thing as society. Indeed they write of moral education that "it needs to offer a vision of a good person and a good society". But most of the solutions they propose to childhood problems are at the level of individual behaviour rather than societal change: "If we want to improve our quality of life, we must above all produce better people."

Archbishop Rowan Williams, patron of the Inquiry Panel, contributes an elegantly waffly 12-page afterword in which he claims that "the report ask far more from

churches and religious communities – as it does from all kinds of bodies in our society”. The text does in places have a vicarish tone (“Children are a sacred bush”). But the nearest the report gets to churchy religion is to refer to spirituality as “an uplifting experience”,
SRP

Surviving

***Selling Your Father's Bones.* By Brian Schofield, Harper Press, 2008**



This is a fascinating account of the fate of Nez Perce (rhymes with Fez Purse) people of the north west of the USA and their land. It uses the narrative of

the desperate 1877 flight from their old homeland in the Wallowa valley towards exile in Canada, as a means to describe the exploitation and near destruction of the West through a particularly rapacious form of capitalism. The industrial pollution (the mile wide purple pit of Butte, Montana, is very memorable) and destructive agriculture are vividly depicted. As a history of a “Native American” group, it is especially useful as it brings the subject right up to date – an annoying feature of books of this nature is the close of the narrative at the loss of political independence, usually deep in the nineteenth century. The contrast between the desolation left after the death of the settler’s dream (the scary empty landscapes of *No Country for Old Men*) and the relative success of the communitarian Nez Perce rewards the reader with vicarious pleasures and hints towards the very real benefits, both economic and social, which socialism will bring.

KAZ

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Exhibition Review

Rank or class?

Rank, the Leeds Art Gallery

“Rank” is an art exhibition organised by Alistair Robinson of the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Arts in Sunderland and on display across the North until the autumn. Its subtitle, “Picturing the Social Order 1516-2009”, pretty much describes its content – a collection of visual depictions of class throughout the centuries. The early material, including a full set of Gustave Doré and Henry Mayhew prints, as well as fascinating and detailed Booth’s poverty map, is excellent and well worth seeing. Sadly nothing so complimentary can be said about the modern material. Where not dominated by slickly produced but impersonal graphs and charts, it is crude, amateurish and incomprehensible.

However, it is not simply a difference in style but a difference in message. Despite the statement by the organisers that “Rank, Situation, Class and Hierarchy are still with us” the message of the moderns is nothing of the sort. Instead of the notion of social class - us and them, whether for good or bad – butchly depicted by the traditional material, we are presented with mere economic inequality – a range of economic states from the long term unemployed (17.5 percent of the population apparently) to the professional or manager. The slogan “No Them - Only Us” prominently displayed in “Rank” becomes one of ersatz social inclusion, a brushing over of the real divisions between owner and owned, a con job which no recipient of a wage, pension or dole - payments from our masters - should take in.

Class is not a moral issue of inequality as depicted here but a social question of ownership and control, whose effects are not just poverty in the narrow economic sense but have echoes throughout society: the machine-like, distorted nature of work – the hellish grind we call wage slavery, the degradation of family and social life; the subjection to the tyranny of the state power; above all, the sense that life under capitalism is not a full human one but one in which the worker is reduced to a unit of production and consumption.

The reduction of class to mere economic inequality – the patronising image of the starving little black baby and the

► 22

Meetings

Annual Conference

Friday **10 April** 10.30 to 5.30
Saturday **11 April**, 10.30 to 5.30
Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4
All Welcome.

Public debate

Thursday **23 April**, 7.30
SHOULD CAPITALISM HAVE A FUTURE?

Yes: John Meadowcroft (Lecturer in Public Policy)

No: Richard Headicar (Socialist Party)
Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Manchester

Monday **27 April**, 8.30 pm
Discussion on Class
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

Capitalism in Crisis: A May Day School for Socialism

Saturday **2 May** 10.30am till 6.00pm
The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street SW4 7UN Tube: Clapham North

IS THE PROFIT SYSTEM WORKING?

1. Capitalism & Economics - Brian Gardner (Glasgow Socialist Party)
2. Capitalism, Resources and the Environment - Gwynn Thomas (South London Socialist Party)
3. Capitalism & Society - Simon Wigley (Central London Socialist Party).

Food and Refreshments will be available:

Public debate

between the Anarchist Federation and the Socialist Party:

“What are the similarities and differences between the Socialist Party and Anarchist positions?”

University of East Anglia
Saturday **30th May**, 2 - 5pm
more details to follow.

Lothians Discussion Group

(under the auspices of the Socialist Party Edinburgh Branch)
Venue: ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh
Every 4th Wednesday of the Month
Time: 7.30pm-9.00pm
Contact:
Fraser Anderson: Fraser@prolerat.org
Jimmy Moir: jimmy@prolerat.org

single mother living on baked beans (which thankfully we were saved from in "Rank") – minimises and marginalises the results of class divided capitalist society. Without the knowledge of class as a social relationship with real personal effects, the worst of which we can mitigate through collective action called the class struggle, the socialist movement would become little more than a charity.

Particularly irritating in "Rank" was the obligatory Karl Marx quotation. The Big Beard's works are literally crammed with punchy one liners yet this is a (deliberately?) dull and long winded quote from *The Communist Manifesto*, which as even the dumbest social science graduate

knows was written by Marx and Engels (the latter possibly having a larger contribution). It accompanies a Dyson cartoon depicting John Bull happily dancing to Master Capitalism's tune. Given his well known interest in class struggle – resistance to the gay dance – this doesn't really show much respect to Chucky does it?

"Rank" is on display at the Leeds Art Gallery until 26 April, then at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Arts in Sunderland from 15 May to 11 July, and finally at the Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool from 24 July to 5 September.

KAZ



More Trouble in Africa



WHEN THE Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was set up in 1953, it was known to be against the wishes of most of the African population in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. They did not want to be taken out of the control of the British Colonial Office to be handed over to domination by the white settlers, whose attitude, as shown particularly in Southern Rhodesia, is much like that of the South African Government. Opponents of Federation, including the British Labour Party, foresaw that tension would increase and were not surprised by the recent disturbances in which a number of Africans were killed by Government forces. Among the Africans the idea of early independence for Nyasaland has been given a powerful stimulus, associated by some of them with more ambitious ideas of a wider nationalism, taking in all Africa.

Are they right? Will "independence" make them better off and happier? Their African leaders tell them there is no doubt about the matter. And it is quite obvious that most Africans would prefer to put up with a lot of inconvenience, even hardship, to escape living under a government which operates or tolerates a colour bar against them. Africans are only behaving like other people, for history is full of examples of resentment of, and revolt against, the imposition on subject

groups, or racial, national, religious and language barriers. And because it has happened so often we have plenty of information about its consequences: nobody need please ignorance.

What then has national independence done for the mass of the population, whether we take the European nationalist movements of last century, such as the Italian struggle against Austria or the Balkan countries' struggles against Turkey, or the quite recent new States set up in former Colonies? Without going into details we can say that national independence is good for local politicians, lawyers, army officers, manufacturers and business men; it opens up careers and money-making opportunities for them, as also for local holders of government civilian posts who may have found their advancement hindered while a foreign administration had control. Sometimes the achievement of national independence helps to speed up industrial development where this has been deliberately limited by the governing Power and may make it rather easier for workers to form trade unions.

(From front page article by 'H', *Socialist Standard*, April 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be brought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



The Rise and rise of “Harperson”

After the next election, spare a thought for those whose job is to analyse and interpret the result – especially those who must point out, among the national assumption that the votes have led to an effective, much needed change in society, that all that has happened is the substitution of one set of reactionary prejudices for another. Consider, for example, the matter of Harriet Harman and all that is thereby implied. She emerged into the political universe in the guise of a feminist so revolutionary and steadfast that one wit could suggest it would be more consistent with her proclaimed principles if she changed her surname to Harperson. This piece of pedestrian humour harked back to the times when anyone observing the House of Commons benches (and even more so those in The Other Place) could be understood for remarking that the only possible government must be over-weighted with mature, wealthy, overbearing males.

From that observation it was only a short, if misdirected, step in logic to the conclusion that the problems – poverty, lack of proper housing, social alienation, war – of current society must spring from that prescribed composition of the occupants of the seats of power. And from that position it was tolerable – if not sustainable – to argue that the only certain remedy for those ills was to elect governments weighted with younger, less monied, more dynamic females. Which returns us, abruptly, to the matter of Harriet Harman – Chair and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Leader of the House of Commons, Lord Privy Seal, Minister for Women and Equality, QC – and hovering contender for the Party leadership in the event that anything should “happen” to Gordon Brown – like being ditched by Labour after too emphatic an electoral defeat.

Family

Harman is very much a product of the traditionally well-heeled Labour political families with connections significant enough to encourage party members to feel comfortably patronised by them. (Although what this does for the patronisers is, of course, a matter for speculation). In her background are to be found the Earl of Longford, Lady Antonia Fraser and, earlier, some of the Chamberlain family who once dominated Conservative politics. True to this tradition, Harman was for five years the legal officer of the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty); in that capacity, on the Grunwick picket line, she met her husband. In 1981 (this seems hardly believable now, were it not that for a politician everything is to be believed) she rebelled against the “royalist orgy” of Prince Charles’ marriage to Diana Spencer by joining with Peter Mandelson and others on a cross-Channel ferry for a republican protest away day in France. “We were a happy band, we had a great deal of fun” the then editor of the *New Statesman* assured us. But this kind of behaviour had to be curbed soon afterwards – in October 1982 Harman joined the other Honourable Members who had fawned so loyally over the doomed royal couple

Socialist Standard

when she won a by-election in Peckham. Her wilder indiscretions looked to be further tamed when, in 1984, she was raised to the opposition front bench, speaking on social services, health and then Treasury matters. After Labour’s 1997 victory Blair put her in charge of the misnamed Department for Social Security but she was sacked after a little more than one year; fulfilling her brief to “reform” the system she had cut the benefit of lone parents but – perhaps more crucially – she had crossed swords too often with junior minister Frank Field.

Iraq

Proving that she has the resilience essential to anyone with ambitions to claw their way up the greasy pole, Harman quickly bounced back; in June 2001 she became Solicitor General – the first woman to hold the job. Since then she has risen steadily, leaving behind her female rivals such as Hazel Blears and Caroline Flint. This is unlikely to have happened without her demonstrating a uncritical readiness to support the government policy on matters such as the “anti-terrorist” laws, the imposition of identity cards, the renewal of Trident. She also voted for the invasion of Iraq – which caused her considerable discomfort later when she appeared to have changed her mind. Responding to a question from Jeremy Paxman on *Newsnight* she confessed: “If I’d have known if there weren’t weapons of mass destruction I wouldn’t have voted for the war. Clearly it was a mistake”. However this was no unconditional conversion because she did not keep to her implied promise when agreeing with Paxman that the Labour Party should apologise for the attack. In any case this was all much too late to save the buildings wiped out by the missiles and the bombs and the tens of thousands of people who had been killed. But it was well timed for Harman’s campaign for the Labour Deputy Leadership, after her own poll had persuaded her that the public favoured her above the other candidates.

Goodwin

Labour MPs in the Commons are often driven to a restless embarrassment at Harman’s performance when Gordon Brown is away and she takes over at Prime Ministers Questions. This is not a time for the considered, meticulously argued response; the MPs want something to make them jeer and wave their order papers. It does not help to have Harman fumbling and stuttering, for example when she said that Fred Goodwin, the sacked ex-boss of the Royal Bank of Scotland, was awarded a knighthood for his work for charity when, as any City wide-boy knows, it was for “services” to banking. The same can be said when she, a solicitor and a QC, announced that the government would stop Goodwin collecting the pension awarded him by the bank he wrecked, in spite of the fact that to do so would be illegal. But these are only incidents in Harman’s drive for the top, in which she is ready to attempt to conceal all unhelpful facts and bend any others.

IVAN



Harriet Harman



Homeless And Clueless

Politicians of all the major political parties have "solutions" for what they call the "homeless problem". In fact there is no homeless problem, what we have is a poverty problem. Here is a recent press story that shows that there are plenty of empty houses available if you have the money. "The number of properties in Britain lying empty is set to pass 1 million. New figures will show that Britain is on course for a record number of houses and flats lying empty. Some of the rise has been caused by home owners facing repossession. Other empty homes were bought by property developers who have since struggled to raise the money to renovate and refurbish them for occupation." (*Daily Telegraph*, 10 February) Inside this crazy social system fish are dumped back in to the sea, fruit is allowed to rot on the trees while millions of people starve, so it comes as no surprise to learn that people in Britain go homeless while 1 million homes lie empty.

The Terminator

In the movies Arnold Schwarzenegger often played the hero, but in real life he has had to bow to the realities of the capitalist system that has slumps and booms undreamed of in the Hollywood fantasy land. "Cash-strapped California is to start notifying 20,000 state workers that they may lose their jobs. A spokesman for Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger made the announcement after California lawmakers failed to approve a \$40bn (£28.2bn) budget. California, the world's

eighth biggest economy, has been hit by the housing crisis, unemployment and falling consumer spending. ..California has already laid off state workers for two days a month, put 2,000 public projects on hold and delayed tax refunds." (*BBC News*, 17 February) Inside the real world

Shandon House, MOD owned, 10 years empty



of capitalism Schwarzenegger has had to play the villain by terminating many workers' means of earning a living.

Labour In Action

The World Bank recently estimated that 2.8 million children could die by 2015 if the global financial crisis is not checked. Commenting on this the Prime Minister Gordon Brown said: "It is as if the entire population of Rome were to die in the next five years." (*Times*, 21 February) This from the leader of the Labour Party who vigorously defends the killer society that is the buying and selling of capitalism. Hypocrisy cannot go further surely when Gordon Brown suspends parliament debate because of the death of the child of one of his opponents in a vote-catching move. He will not of course suspend the running of capitalism or its parliament over the possible death of 2.8 million kids.

Capitalist Priorities

Despite the economic crisis in the US the government recently announced an increase in its military budget. "The collision of modern American life with the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression has had some strange and unintended consequences. In Alpine, Utah, for example, a school has cancelled the entire 6th grade, with the teachers at Mountainville Academy dismissed just before Christmas and the 12-year-olds merged with the 7th grade." (*Times*, 21 February) That is the priorities of capitalism - keep up military expenditure to protect the owning class's markets and sources of raw materials, but sack teachers and worsen the education of workers' children.

The Wasteful Society

In the most developed capitalist society on Earth we learn of this horror story. "The US jobless rate jumped in February to 8.1%, according to official figures from the Labor Department. The number of people out of work rose by 651,000 during the month. Both figures were bigger than expected. ...President Obama said that the number of jobs lost so far in the recession was "astounding". Speaking in Ohio, he added: "I don't need to tell the people of this state what statistics like this mean," saying that he had signed his economic stimulus package in order to save jobs. The extra 161,000 jobs added to December and January's figures mean that almost two million jobs have been lost in the past three months." (*BBC News*, 6 March) Think what this means, two million workers are being debarred from producing things that are necessary for human existence. Why? Because it isn't profitable enough. Two million workers and their kids are being impoverished not because of some failing on their part but because of this awful society we all live in. Don't you think it is time that those 2 million workers in the US thought of an alternative society? Shouldn't you?

Free Lunch



by Rigg



socialist standard



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4 June 2009

European Elections

BIGGEST EVER - STILL NO CHOICE

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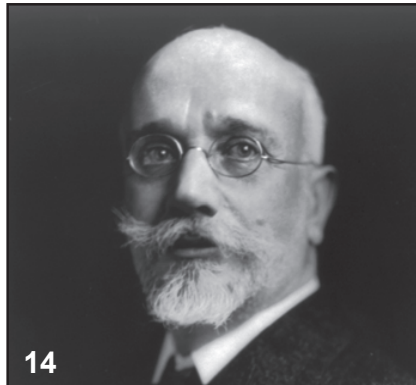
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 9 May** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
tel: 020 7622 3811
e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Toxic products

Negotiations are heating up between our rulers. With an economy cooling and a planet warming, there would appear much to talk about. In the short-term there is an economic system needing urgent shoring up: the confidence of workers in the system is disappearing as quickly as the confidence of bankers, employers and shareholders that they can turn a profit.

But in the longer-term it would appear that global warming is likely to present an even greater challenge to individual states to start serious discussions with each other. Every inch of the planet's surface has been mapped and claimed by one bunch of gangsters or another. The atmosphere and the air we breathe however is uncontrollable and has therefore historically been the global sewer into which capitalist economies have spewed their so-called "externalities" (those things not traditionally accounted for by the market). The CO₂ disappears into thin air: out-of-sight and conveniently off the balance sheet.

Capitalism appears to be having serious difficulty in identifying and quantifying its own (so-called "toxic") internal liabilities and risks. What hope can we have that this system will ever really be able to deal properly with the overlooked externalities – including a genuinely "toxic" by-product of economic activity, in the form of CO₂ emissions.

From Beijing to Bonn, and Moscow to Mumbai, the battle lines are already being drawn up as negotiations tighten over the sort of global regulatory regimes required to address both the credit

crunch and the CO₂ crunch.

Despite their apparent collective willingness (in the form of countless speeches and statements) to address both the weakening economy and rising CO₂ emissions, it is clear that there are other forces at work, acting to slow and stall this process. Every state has a "special interest" in protecting or advancing the interests of the various sectors of its own capitalist class. That, after all, is pretty much the job of the state.

Members and sympathisers of the World Socialist Movement can be found in many countries around the world. Where we can, we organise politically to put the case for socialism in front of the workers of the world. The arguments put by a world socialist from the US or the UK is the same as that put by a world socialist from India or Ghana. We have no regional interests, and only one "special interest" – "the emancipation of the global working-class".

Our case is consistent not just for the last 100 years, but also across continents, cultures and languages. From farmers in India to IT workers in China, from the unemployed of Europe to the overworked of the US, the experience of workers across the globe can differ greatly. But in some crucial respects the same story is repeated, with differing degrees only of exploitation, alienation, poverty, insecurity and stress. Investigate our case. Test it against your own experience. If it chimes with how you're thinking, then join us and hasten the day when humanity finally grows up and takes responsibility for its planet.



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Socialism on drugs

When young people ask if there would be drugs in socialism, they don't have in mind things like Seroxat and Prozac, they mean Skunk and Poppers. We can't say these things would be 'legal' or 'illegal', because the status of 'law' in a cooperative stateless community remains to be debated. What we can say is, if people need a drug and there is no good, scientific reason for not manufacturing it, it will no doubt be produced.

Capitalism has a funny attitude to drugs, both the legal, medical kind and the illegal, recreational kind. Legal drugs with important medicinal properties are often not produced because there is no profit in doing so, often because the patents on them have expired and lie in the public domain. This is the problem facing the new 'Polypill', a cocktail of five very cheap drugs which evidence suggests may halve the rate of strokes and heart attacks in middle-aged people (*'The polypill: Medicine's magic bullet'*, *Independent*, 31 March). It works, but it won't be produced because it doesn't make money. Much the same can be said of many other cheap, unexploitable drugs which would save millions of lives in developing countries yet can't turn enough bucks for the big boys. Instead the drug companies concentrate on research into diseases of rich, white westerners, such as obesity and skin cancer.

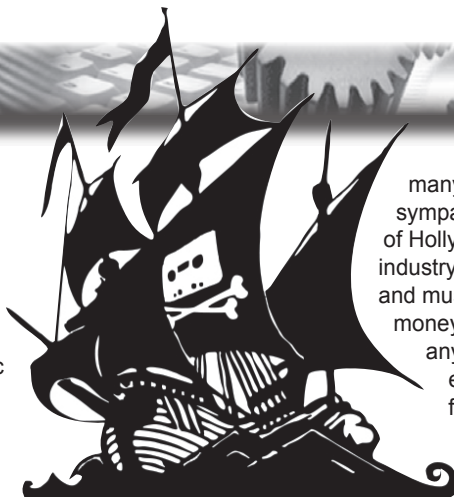
Where there's a wallet, there's a way, but even if you accept capitalism's own profit-oriented logic, its attitude to illegal recreational drugs still fails to make any kind of sense. From Al Capone to Afghanistan, the history of drug prohibition by capitalism continues to represent one of the most bizarrely stupid aspects of a social system never notable for its good judgment. The lesson of America's prohibition period should have taught the world that if you banned coffee today, you would create a coffee mafia tomorrow, in the process creating an unnecessary and, from the ruling class point of view, expensive 'war on coffee' simply to deprive people of something harmless that they like. We would also see a crime problem at every scale from coffee barons and their private armies to burglaries and back-alley shootings over a jar of Maxwell House in Manchester.

Many of the arguments against illicit drugs are bogus, unscientific and politically oriented. In particular, the idea that legalisation would create a massive social problem of a drug-crazed free-for-all is not borne out by the experience of Holland, or more recently of Portugal, which decriminalised illicit drugs in 2001. There, it turns out, drug usage and associated behavioural pathologies are among the lowest in all the EU countries, especially when compared to those countries with very restrictive drug laws (*Cato Institute White Paper*, 2 April).

While the drugs 'problem' is not a make or break issue for socialists, it does illustrate how capitalism tends to operate in defiance of any logic, even its own. Even leaving aside more pressing issues like poverty, war or climate change, it ought to be obvious from this that it is simply not clever to leave major decisions about production and supply in the hands of an unelected and uncontrollable minority. The capitalist ruling class are making the whole planet ill, and there's no magic pill for that.

Arthouse socialism

One accessibility issue about which there would be no question whatever in socialism is that of copyright, so the young Swedes recently convicted of copyright infringement over their Pirate Bay file-sharing site would have no case to answer in a society of common ownership (*'Court jails Pirate Bay founders'*, BBC Online, 17 April). Their defence, that their web server did not contain illicit material, was always a long shot. True, they weren't handling 'stolen' goods themselves, but the court took the view that they were doing the equivalent of standing outside a house full of silverware and directing passers-by towards the open windows.



The Pirate Bay

Sinking ship?

from ever being born in the first place, as well as narrowing the full spectrum of human creativity to a thin channel of bland commercial profitability. Who can say how many Mozarts, Mendels or Modiglianis the world has killed or incapacitated through poverty, wars or sheer overwork?

The Swedish defendants are probably too busy organising their appeal to note an amusing story in the British papers which shows that even the police don't take music copyright seriously. The Wiltshire police have just had a £32,000 bill from the Performing Rights Society for the playing of music in Wiltshire nicks (*'Music bill forces police off beat'*, BBC Online, 17 April). Now the boys in blue are banned from their boogie boxes. Presumably they'll just have to use their whistles.

No-spam socialism

Trivial point maybe, but socialism wouldn't see much in the way of spam, the background white noise of online capitalism, since commercial advertising of products wouldn't exist, nor any dodgy Nigerian money scams. So most emails would presumably be legitimate, apart possibly from those tedious 'Hey, this is hilarious, send it on!' posts which in any case only prove that workers under capitalism will resort to any tactic to waste their bosses' time at work. The environmental significance of this irritating feature of cyber-capitalism has now been highlighted by a new report which for the first time relates spam to carbon emissions. Every year, says the report, 62 trillion spam messages are sent globally, representing 33 billion kilowatt hours of energy and 17 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions (*BBC Online*, 16 April). When a spam site was recently closed, the resulting 70 percent drop in global spam was equivalent to taking 2.2 million cars off the road, according to the antivirus company McAfee. Next day, of course, another site was up and running instead. On with the show.



Socialists, as indeed many workers, have little sympathy for the fat cats of Hollywood and the music industry. Most writers, actors and musicians make no money out of their creativity anyway, so the property laws do nothing for them. Indeed, by giving workers so little respite from wage-slavery, it could be argued that capitalism prevents much art and science

Dirty work

Dear Editors

Re March 2009 *Socialist Standard* article 'The real dirty work'. A very good article but the phrase 'Since there will be no employment or jobs in socialism,' needs in my view some qualification.

I know we've used examples of dirty work to include removing refuse, working in sewers etc., but I remember a Party speaker who included such things as surgeons poking about inside human bodies in the course of their work.

We may or may not agree whether this or other examples constitute dirty work but what is certain is that a socialist society could not rely on such work being undertaken on a 'rota basis' or by a 'call for volunteers'. There would have to be organisation of socialists (can't call them 'workers' in socialism presumably) for production and distribution of the necessities of life.

Would we like a situation where one day someone says 'I think I'll volunteer to be a brain surgeon, or shift a few bin-bags today - I just feel like it.' Of course no-one in their right mind would go along with such an idea.

Going back to the words 'employment' and 'jobs', both in capitalism refer mainly to paid work, but of course they both can and will mean what my Thesaurus includes - 'job, chores, work, duty, service, occupation, function, undertaking, assignment, engage in, devote oneself to' - need I say more?

P. HART (by e-mail)



The latest edition of *Imagine*, the Socialist Party of Canada's journal, is out now. Cheque or money order for £1 (including postage) to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

The Crisis: Don't Read About It!

The *Sun* newspaper should be no more abhorrent to socialists than any other capitalist propaganda rag. In a spirit of intellectual equanimity I occasionally take the wretched organ along with more sober rags of the ruling elite in order to gainsay and refute the views of supporters of the profit system.

Now, as the world capitalist system moves inexorably towards another catastrophic slump it behoves the class traitor scribblers of the "popular press" to divert our attention from the problems facing us as a consequence of capitalism's irresolvable internal contradictions.

But don't worry - the *Sun* has a "Happy Page":

"The pound crumbles, the economy tumbles and Gordon Brown finally rumbles that we are heading for the big recession.

So to take your mind off the sad economic tidings there are plenty of cheery stories scattered throughout *The Sun*.

And for uninterrupted fun turn to Page 20 our new Happy Page.

If you have any stories or photos that will raise British spirits why not send them to us and do your bit in the War against Gloom effort."

As the "Real Economy" goes into recession and people lose their jobs, homes and belief in the future of their communities we are exhorted by the *Sun* to turn to page 20 and have a chortle as workers' lives under capitalism crumble around our ears.

Socialists have long understood the function of the reactionary media in the intellectual conditioning of capitalist society. Workers are bombarded by propaganda on a myriad of fronts. In the last 30 years the *Sun* has cornered the market in combining "politics", gambling and tits with criminal and celebrity witch hunts.

Whilst the world working class is entering a period in which there will be a sustained, angry and possibly violent attack upon our meagre living standards and individual rights by the ruling class, we must challenge the "official" media at every turn, the more apparently "learned" daily journals such as the *Guardian*, *Independent* or *Telegraph* as well as the *Sun*.

At this time the fanciful notion that "taxpayers money" is being used to stave off capitalist crisis is being promulgated by the mainstream media. Whilst, in

reality the capitalist class is using State funds generated on the backs of the labour of workers to prop up the profit system and to provide them with a surplus. The capitalist media are also wrestling all their capacity to prepare us for yet another period of belt-tightening.

The reasons for the failings of capitalism, and the potential to resolve the problems caused to people under the grip of the system are often very near to the grasp of workers' thinking, both individually and collectively. My trajectory towards socialist consciousness began as a very young man witnessing the "shaking out" of staff at R.M. Douglas Construction Ltd of Birmingham in 1992. I saw proud middle-aged, "company" men, some with over 25 years service, cry openly as they were told they were surplus to requirements for the firm.

So, as the reality of capitalist recession imposes itself once more on the already beleaguered working class the last thing we need to do is to read "Happy News" on Page 20 of *The Sun* newspaper.

Andy P. Davies

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see page 16 for more details



Global warming: is it (or will it soon be) too late?

On 28 February, a sizeable chunk (400 sq. km.) of the Antarctic ice sheet toppled into the sea. This was just the latest sign that the planet is heating up more rapidly than the quasi-official forecasts of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have led us to expect.

Why does reality outpace prediction?

For one thing, scientists are trained to be cautious. Most are reluctant to “speculate” – meaning to think a possibility through to its logical end result. They are especially reticent when addressing a broad public. Those who occupy positions in or close to government are under pressure to avoid “alarmism” and be “politically realistic.” To preserve a modicum of influence on the ruling class they must maintain an impression of respectable complacency.

It is, of course, extremely difficult to form an adequate understanding of such a complex interactive system as the global climate. Scientists rely on computerised forecasting models to simulate such systems. But such models can only incorporate factors that are already well understood and not subject to excessive uncertainty. There is an inevitable lag, often a lengthy one, between the discovery of a new danger or feedback mechanism and its adequate representation in the models.

Thus, the usual prediction for rise in sea level by 2100 is a little under one meter. We can cope with that, surely! But the only factor that it takes into account is thermal expansion, which is fairly easy to calculate. The big rise that will inundate coastal cities and vast lowland areas is that which will follow collapse of the Arctic and Antarctic ice sheets, but no one knows when it will occur.

Standard mathematical models are designed to analyse continuous, relatively gradual change. The greatest dangers, however, are posed by abrupt changes that give further sudden impetus to climate change. The collapse of ice sheets is one example. Another likely near-term event of this kind is a conflagration, sparked by increasingly hot and dry summertime conditions, that destroys much or even most of the remaining Amazonian rainforest, turning an important carbon sink into yet another carbon emitter.

Probably less imminent but even more terrifying is the prospect of the release into the atmosphere of massive amounts of methane as a result of the breakdown of frozen gas-ice compounds in the permafrost as it melts and on the ocean floor as it warms up. Methane is by far the most powerful of the greenhouse gases. It is also poisonous to life, at least as we know it.

These dangers explain why some scientists fear that global warming may reach a “tipping point” beyond which it will become irreversible – that is, beyond all hope of effective human counteraction. Within a few generations, “runaway” climate change would then generate extreme

conditions that human beings will be unable to withstand.

This fear is fuelled by our knowledge of the geological record, which contains abundant evidence of past climatic disasters in which numerous species became extinct. It seems that when the biosphere of our planet is jolted out of its not very stable equilibrium – whether by collision with a meteorite or asteroid, by a supervolcanic eruption or by the insanity of capitalist production and consumption – it is susceptible to catastrophic climatic upheaval.

Environmentalists often warn that unless adequate action to arrest global warming is taken within a clearly specified and relatively short period it will be “too late.” Some socialists say the same thing, with the important proviso that “adequate action” must mean, above all, the establishment of world socialism. The urgency of the warning, it is hoped, will rouse people from lethargy to frenetic activism, though I suspect it is more likely to reduce them to despair.

These warnings have been repeated for quite a few years now, so it is natural that they should escalate. First, the time horizon shortens – from 15 – 20 years to ten or even five. Then the idea surfaces that time must surely have run out by now. Is it not already too late?

In my opinion, the current state of scientific knowledge does not permit us to make categorical declarations of this sort. We cannot exclude the *possibility* that it will soon be, or already is, too late. Capitalism may have set in motion processes – perhaps processes that we do not yet even clearly perceive, let alone understand – on which no human ingenuity will have a significant effect. But nor can we exclude the possibility that it is *not* too late, that even 30, 40 or 50 years from now it will not be too late.

Discussions of runaway climate change rarely take into proper consideration the potential of cosmic engineering projects such as giant space mirrors to divert the sun’s rays. Although these projects may entail risks of their own, the longer the transition to world socialism is delayed the more urgently the space agency of socialist society is likely to pursue them.

For all the uncertainties, we can be certain regarding some vital points.

- * If we do have a chance of survival, it is contingent on the establishment of world socialism. If capitalism continues indefinitely, then sooner or later we are doomed.

- * The sooner we establish socialism the better. But better late than never.

- * The climatic and environmental threat to human survival will come to occupy central place among the concerns that inspire people to work for socialism, overshadowing all else.







TRUST ME, I'M A DOCTOR!

"Dr. Hershel Samuels, an orthopedic surgeon, put his hand on the worker's back. "Mild spasm bilaterally," he said softly. He pressed his fingers gingerly against the side of the man's neck. "The left cervical is tender," he said, "even to light palpation." The worker, a driver for a plumbing company, told the doctor he had fallen, banging up his back, shoulder and ribs. He was seeking expanded workers' compensation benefits because he no longer felt he could do his job. Dr. Samuels, an independent medical examiner in the state workers' compensation system, seemed to agree. As he moved about a scuffed Brooklyn office last April, he called out test results indicative of an injured man. His words were captured on videotape. Yet the report Dr. Samuels later submitted to the New York State Workers' Compensation Board cleared the driver for work and told a far different story: no back spasms, no tender neck. In fact, no recent injury at all. "If you did a truly pure report," he said later in an interview, "you'd be out on your ears and the insurers wouldn't pay for it. You have to give them what they want, or you're in Florida. That's the game, baby." (*New York Times*, 31 March)

FRED AND FORLORN

"Oxfam is warning that the economic downturn is creating more poverty in the UK, making life tougher for the fifth of the population already struggling to get by. Kathleen Carter lives in poverty. At her home in Stockton-on-Tees, she cares full-time for her disabled son and husband. Her life is a constant round of cleaning, cooking, preparing medication and shopping on a very tight budget. The only income is from her pension and a small amount of benefits. She says: "It can be very soul-destroying. I've got to think of everything I buy, life is a real struggle because all the time you are thinking about what you are spending." Mrs Carter is one of the so-called Freds. It is a term Oxfam has created standing for Forgotten, Ripped-off, Excluded and Debt-ridden." (*BBC News*, 8 April)

OF ALL THE SLUMS IN ALL THE WORLD...

"This seaside city is known as a rich stockpile of art deco architecture, the hub of Morocco's economic growth and the setting of an all-time classic movie starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman.

But Casablanca is also the capital of a bleaker aspect of modern Morocco - sprawling slums, where huge families are packed into shanties with tin roofs rusted by the ocean winds, and goats and donkeys munch stray garbage.

"It's as if we're eating straight from the gutter," said Mina Abujaman, 48, describing the squalor.

"We spend half our time cleaning up," said the mother of seven and grandmother of two, pointing at the children playing in the mud while women carry water back from the communal fountain - all amid whiffs of sewage.

It's not surprising, of course, that things do not go according to plan in a crowded Arab city where illusion is part of the atmosphere. Tourists' snapshots of busy alleyways miss the squalor behind the walls, and the famous 1942 movie "Casablanca" was not filmed here at all, but mostly at studios in Burbank, Calif., with the misty farewell of hero and heroine shot nearby at Van Nuys airport." (www.wtop.com)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON
Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 21st May. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, NI8. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail: 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

NORTHWEST

Lancaster branch. Meets every Monday 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380
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Cumbria. Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG

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Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

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Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

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Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

Cardiff and District. John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

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The theology of interest

Sharia-compliant Islamic banking is apparently expanding with even non-Muslims switching to Islamic banks, reports the *Times* (12 March). According to the article's author, Alex Wade, "under Sharia law, the charging or paying of interest is prohibited". But, since banks do business by borrowing money at one rate of interest and re-lending it a higher rate, how can a bank which does not pay or charge interest exist?

This is to underestimate the subtlety of Islamic theologians, following in the footsteps of their end-of-Middle Ages Catholic and Protestant counterparts. In the Middle Ages the dogma of the Catholic Church banned usury, defined as charging money for a loan. Well, but not quite:

"No man, again, may charge money for a loan. He may, of course, take the profits of partnership, provided that he takes the partner's risks. He may buy a rent-charge; for the fruits of the earth are produced by nature, not wrung from men. He may demand compensation - *interesse* - if he is not repaid the principal at the time stipulated. He may ask payments corresponding to any loss he incurs or forgoes. He may purchase an annuity, for the payment is contingent and speculative, not certain" (RH Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, ch 1(ii)).

What was banned, then, was only the *certainty* of being paid a pre-fixed sum of money for the loan. As Tawney pointed out, the very word "interest" derives from one of the ways of getting round the ban on usury.

Islam, too, allows partnerships as well as a number of other arrangements which allow the payment of a pre-fixed sum of money for advancing money. Wade's article mentions: *salaam* ("sale contract with deferred delivery"), *arbourum* ("sale contract with a non-refundable deposit") and *murabaha* ("deferred sale financing").

So, while Islamic banks do not borrow money on the money market, they can still make what are in effect loans which bring in money for them. In any event, Islam is not opposed to profits and profit-making since these are regarded as non-certain rewards for advancing money.

In the end the Catholic church was obliged to face reality and, to try to keep the poor from being exploited by usurers, from the middle of the 15th century itself set up bodies to lend money to the poor. These were called *monts-de-piété* (literally "mounts of piety"), which is still the French word for pawnbroker, though on the Continent these are state-run bodies. They did not spread to England as Protestantism, which triumphed here in the 16th century, had no qualms about lending at interest. As a result pawnbroking has always been a private business here.

And these days in fact a profitable business which, along with cheapo shops like Aldi and Lidl, is doing well in the current depression. The leading pawnbroker firm in Britain is H&T, whose shares are quoted on the Stock Exchange. It has 105 stores and made £10 million profits in 2008 compared with £7.1 million in 2007. It charges 8 percent interest per month.

Wade doesn't say if there are any Islamic pawnbrokers, but it shouldn't be difficult to find some imam or mullah to justify this as a form of "deferred sale financing".

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The cult of Irish Republicanism

The Real IRA and the Continuity IRA represent nothing but the pale ghosts of yesterday.

For over a hundred years now Ireland, and particularly Northern Ireland since it came into existence in 1921, has been politically structured by what Sean O'Casey called, in one of his memorable plays, *The Shadow of the Gunman*. The gunman, and more recently in deference to the times, his female equivalent, has been legal and illegal, protestant and catholic, brave and cowardly but at all times and in all guises, a dangerous irrelevancy as far as the working class is concerned.

Ruling classes everywhere mythologise the politics of their regime in order to conceal the fact that their wealth and opulent lifestyles are based on the poverty and degradation of their subject classes. In Ireland that process has been further mystified and obfuscated by years of colonisation and the deliberate action of Britain, the colonial master, of introducing religious sectarianism into Ireland's toxic tribal mix at the beginning of the 17th century.

That evil, the curse of inter-religious conflict, was part of Elizabethan England's strategy for a final solution to the problem of Gaelic resistance to English rule in Ireland which was most formidable in the province of Ulster. In 1603 the native Gaelic people were driven from their lands; their lands were confiscated by the Crown and gifted in large tracts to undertakers favoured by the English Court. In turn the beneficiaries of this act of imperial theft introduced tenants from Scotland and northern England and it was no accident that these were largely protestant.

The plantation of Ulster was simply part of the process whereby ruling classes further their interests and build empires. The incoming 'planters' were not the villains in the piece; rather were they innocent instruments of a power-hungry imperialism; poor peasant farmers following a promise of a better

existence - in fact many would have been the descendants of earlier 'Scotti' emigrants who left Ireland in search of a better life in Scotland. History should have absorbed the conflicts created by the plantation of Ulster but, history is largely fashioned by economics, and a radical dichotomy in the land tenure between the province of Ulster, the area planted, and the rest of Ireland was to foster bitter new conflicts between opposing forms of

no rights either in law or in custom attending the lot of the tenant. He was a tenant-at-will, the will of his landlord; without any security of tenure, 'fairness' of rent or right to any compensation for any improvement to his holding or his habitation. Indeed

nationalism, each concealed in a quasi-religious political doctrine; bitter, nauseous and wholly irrelevant to the interests of the working class on the island of Ireland.

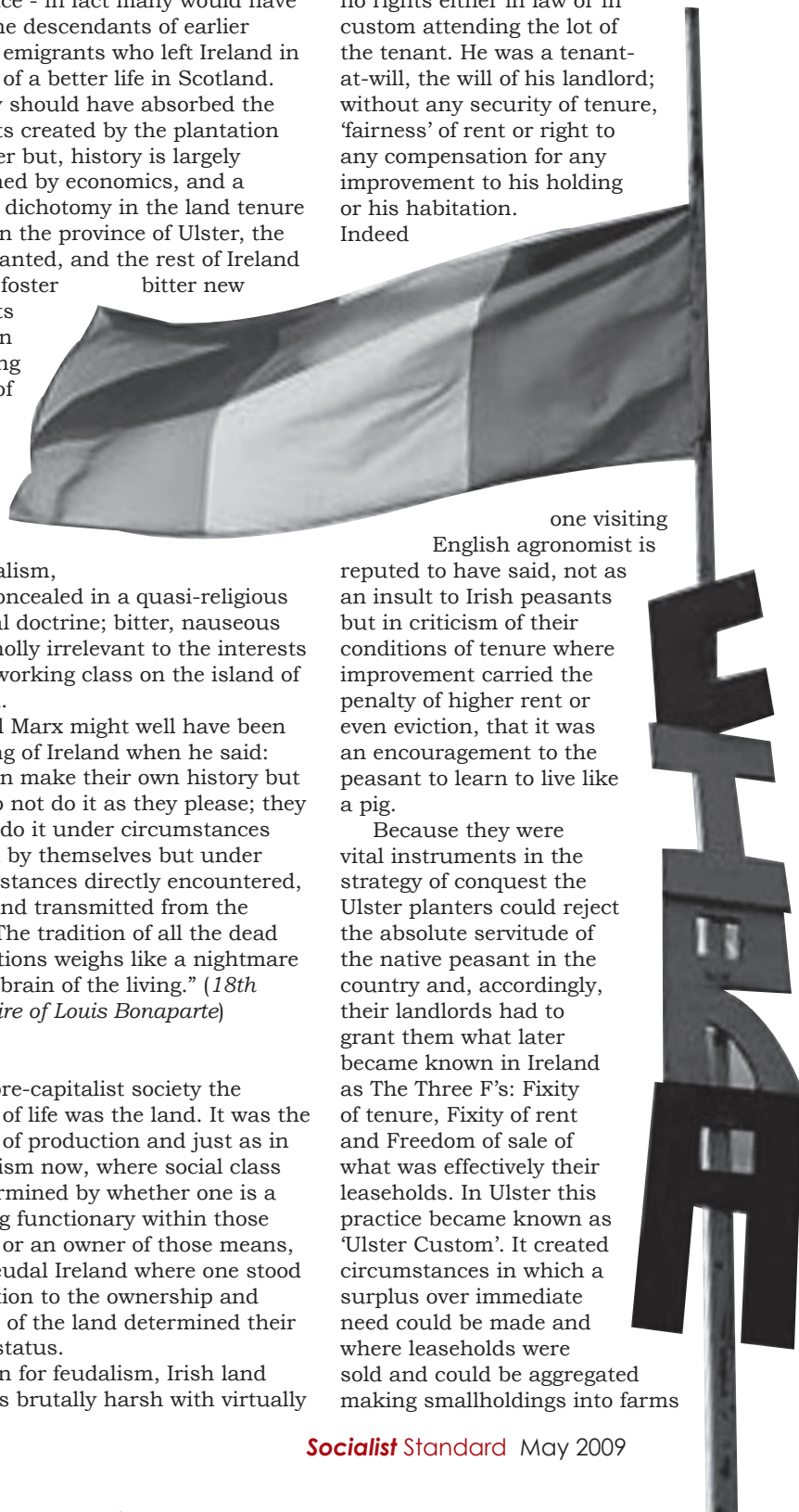
Karl Marx might well have been thinking of Ireland when he said: "Men make their own history but they do not do it as they please; they do not do it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." (18th *Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

In pre-capitalist society the means of life was the land. It was the means of production and just as in capitalism now, where social class is determined by whether one is a working functionary within those means or an owner of those means, so in feudal Ireland where one stood in relation to the ownership and control of the land determined their social status.

Even for feudalism, Irish land law was brutally harsh with virtually

one visiting English agronomist is reputed to have said, not as an insult to Irish peasants but in criticism of their conditions of tenure where improvement carried the penalty of higher rent or even eviction, that it was an encouragement to the peasant to learn to live like a pig.

Because they were vital instruments in the strategy of conquest the Ulster planters could reject the absolute servitude of the native peasant in the country and, accordingly, their landlords had to grant them what later became known in Ireland as The Three F's: Fixity of tenure, Fixity of rent and Freedom of sale of what was effectively their leaseholds. In Ulster this practice became known as 'Ulster Custom'. It created circumstances in which a surplus over immediate need could be made and where leaseholds were sold and could be aggregated making smallholdings into farms



and peasants into small farmers. It extended the use of money within the community thus establishing an essential element in the development of trade: a purchasing power.

By the time of the Industrial Revolution Ulster had its nascent capitalist class and it developed apace with the development of capitalism in Britain, a development enhanced by the general level of literacy, a burgeoning commercial trade and a not insignificant number of immigrant entrepreneurs. During the mid-19th century, referred to by the economist Hobsbawm as *The Age of Capital*, Ulster underwent rapid development in shipbuilding, heavy and light engineering, as well as textiles and rope-making. In fact Ulster industry became an integral part of British capitalism; dependant for energy and raw materials on Britain and its Empire and vitally beholden to the then-prevailing system of Empire Preference for its market.

Ironically, it was in this climate of bourgeois prosperity in Ulster that Republican ideas began to emerge and the idea of backing those ideas with the threat and the reality of armed force. The idea of republican violence did not come from the dispossessed or the rebellious catholics but from elements within the protestant middle-class who argued that the government - which they generally referred to as the Crown - was supporting discriminatory measures against Irish trade.

Typical of those articulating this opinion was the Belfast industrialist, J Alexander Hamilton who told an audience of his class peers in the Belfast Linen Hall on the 14th May 1784:

"It cannot be said that the government truly represents our interests in matters of trade or industry nor can we hold faith with the Crown to allow it that right. Our limping independence is on the sufferance of the Crown who again can be influenced by powerful English interests in trade and industry to restrict us and hamper the further development of our trade and industry... What they had the right to give they had the right to take and it is our sacred duty to remove from the crown that right and build our own constitutional structures, our own freedom and the absolute right to plan for the advancement of our own trade and commerce. It is a lesson that has been learnt in America and one that

we in this country will have to learn even if it means the broadening of outlook in matters of political concern at home."

That was the voice that spoke incipient republican rebellion, echoed by Henry Joy McCracken and the northern leaders of The United Irishmen. They were protestants, articulating the problems of Ulster capitalism and allying the rebellious interests of their class, with clarions of patriotism. Their republicanism came from the French Revolution and the American War of Independence via the pages of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* and encapsulated in the vision of Wolfe Tone.

Four years later in 1798 Irish Republicanism staged an abortive rebellion in the name of "Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter". In Ulster

on the abundance of cereal crop and livestock that was being shipped out to foreign tables. Early victims of the brutal capitalist doctrine of Laissez-faire.

Within a decade the population of Ireland had been reduced by some two million to an estimated six million. The land was still haemorrhaging its people to England, Australia and, especially, to the United States where Irish conspiracy, rooted in the Clan na Gael was fostering the Fenian movement for republican insurrection in Ireland. The Fenian Brotherhood was closer to the common people preaching a class gospel and angering the Church which caused Archbishop Moriarty, with questionable theological soundness, to speculate that Hell

"The idea of republican violence did not come from the dispossessed or the rebellious catholics but from elements within the protestant middle-class"

the enemy was the forces of the Crown; in the rest of Ireland, apart from a failed incursion by French forces in the west of Ireland, the rebellion was largely restricted to the county of Wexford where the United Men were largely Catholics, their leader a catholic priest and their primary enemy protestants - inevitably their rack-renting landlords.

While capitalism was developing in Ulster in the rest of the country outbreaks of violence were common. The landlord and the Crown were the enemies of the downtrodden, brutally impoverished serf-like Irish peasant; it was a political struggle that was allied to patriotism only insofar as the Crown was identified with the landlord and the reality of agrarian poverty. The heady days of European revolution in the mid-19th century was reflected in Ireland more in the literature of protest than armed conflict. There was little violence; the patriots of the Young Ireland movement spoke the hurt and anger of a people in despair; people whose staple diet, the potato had for a second year turned to foul putrefaction in the fields; people burying their dead because they could not afford to live



The Fenian Brotherhood in the USA

was not hot enough nor eternity long enough to punish them.

The vagaries of world capitalism was having a drastic effect on food prices which were falling rapidly and gravely effecting the income of the Irish peasantry more and more of whom were falling into rent arrears. Between 1872 and 1885 well over 200,000 tenants were evicted and at one protest meeting in response to mass eviction notices served by the landlord, a catholic priest called Geoffrey Burke who had inherited an estate from his brother, a speech by

Tom Brennan, a prominent Fenian, demonstrates how far ahead in its thinking the Fenian movement, now in decay, was over the purely nationalist thinking of the Irish Parliamentary Party and its political heirs Sinn Fein. Brennan said:

“You may get a Federal Parliament, perhaps the Repeal of the Union, nay more, you may establish an Irish Republic, but as longed as tillers of the soil are forced to support a useless and indolent aristocracy, your Federal Parliament would be a bauble and your Irish Republic a fraud,” (quoted in *The Land League Crisis*, N D Palmer. Yale Historical Publications).

Fenian activity was poorly organised and badly coordinated but it left its martyrs to fester in the fecund soil of bitter discontent and, in the incarnation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood it was to light the fuse of Irish Rebellion in 1916 and the subsequent Anglo-Irish War out of which modern Ireland emerged. It is impossible in a short article to knit all the threads of festering revolt that were converging on a political denouement in Ireland: Michael Davitt’s courageous Land League and the attempts to unify the struggle against Landlordism with the struggle of an emerging proletariat played a vital role that ultimately found a measure of success in a series of Land Purchase Acts between 1885 and 1903. These Acts made interest-bearing loans of public money available to buy out their holdings. The landlords made token protest but in most cases were glad to salvage a final settlement from their ill-gotten plunder.

The story of the part played by the terrible potato famine of 1845/50 in helping to create a southern, largely catholic, middle class, has still to be written but it was a factor among many others in the emerging of a politically-articulate, fledgling bourgeoisie. More importantly for the future of Ireland the political interest of that class was in direct conflict with those of its class brethren in Ulster. Charles Stewart Parnell the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party enunciated the political requirements of nascent southern capitalism in a major speech at Arklow on the 20th August 1885; in precise terms Parnell made clear the economic motive for an Irish government: to protect a weak Irish capitalism confronted by the competition of English capitalism.

Subsequently a more bellicose Sinn Fein said the same thing:

“If an Irish manufacturer cannot produce an article as cheaply as an English or other foreign capitalist, only because his foreign competitor has larger resources at his disposal, then it is the first duty of the Irish nation to accord protection to that manufacturer.” (*Sinn Fein Policy*, 1907 Edition)

“The IRA was an army of workers fighting for the clearly-defined interests of their bosses.”



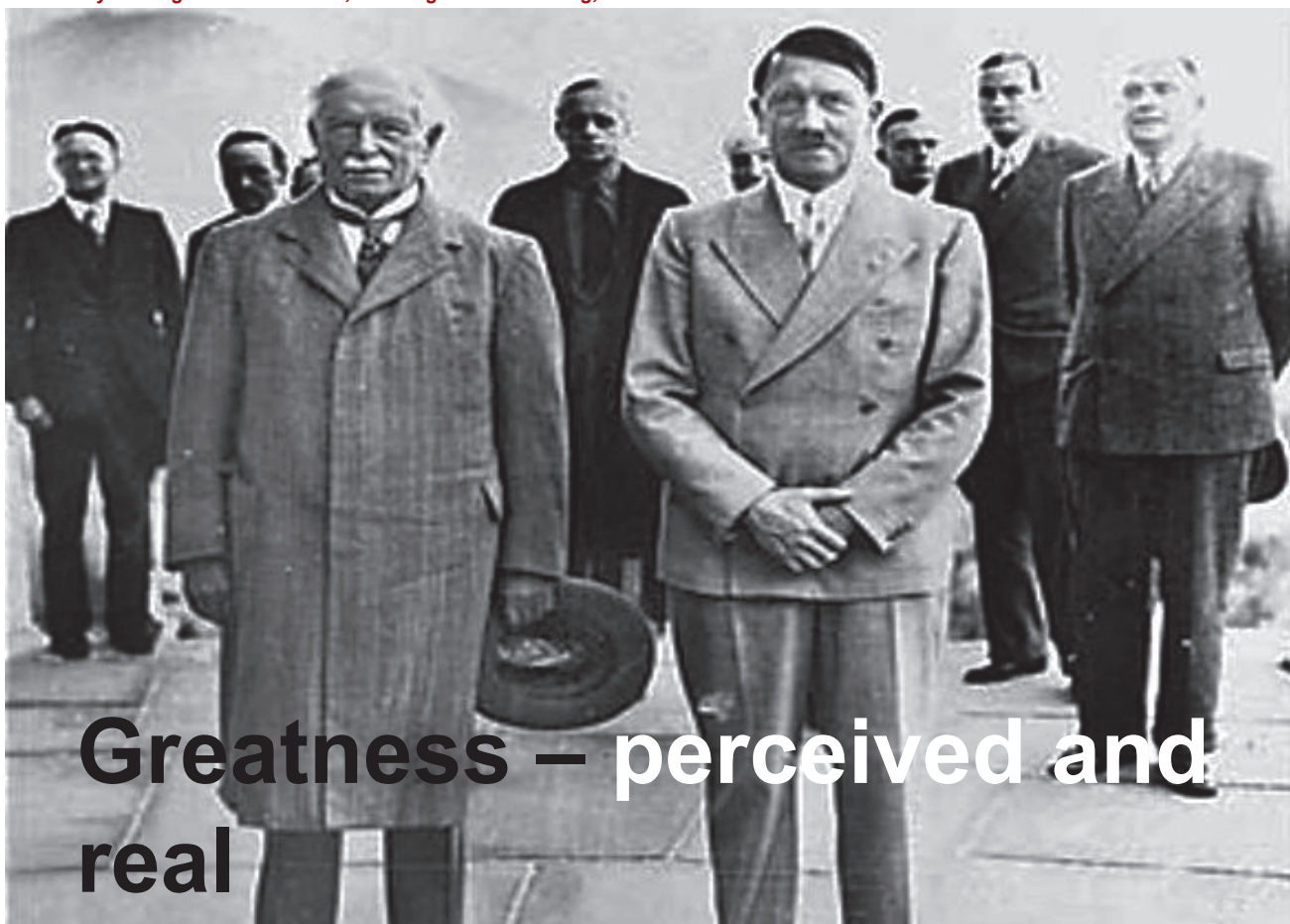
That was the political policy which underpinned the Easter Rising of 1916 and the subsequent IRA guerrilla struggle to ‘free’ Ireland. The IRA was an army of workers fighting for the clearly-defined interests of their bosses. Ironically, as we have shown earlier, the protection they wanted to achieve for southern capitalists would have been ruinous for northern capitalists. There was no basis for unity.

Since the partition of Ireland in 1921, Sinn Fein and the IRA have undergone many vicissitudes but,

effectively, after partition and the defeat of the IRA in the ensuing civil war they had become a cult, a representative of “the dead generations”. In 1962, after an abortive ‘Border Campaign’ that had become its period of attrition a short time after it began in 1956, the IRA confessed its lack of support, accused northern nationalists of selling their heritage for a mess of pottage - British ‘welfare’ capitalism - and established constitutional Republican Clubs to pursue social issues. The absurdly sectarian Unionist government - always conscious of the benefits of an IRA threat at election times - immediately banned the Clubs and left the framework for thirty-odd years of sectarian violence.

Does the resuscitated IRA that resurfaced in 1970 and after decades of struggle won a share in the political administration of the entity it set out to banish, disprove our contention that the concept of armed IRA struggle had become a futile cult following their political and military defeat by southern government forces in 1922?

The answer to that question is twofold. Firstly, their very presence in the current northern administration is not a victory; on the contrary, it is an acknowledged recognition of the failure of armed violence to unite a people. Secondly, the IRA of the 1950’s that accepted its political rejection by the people, like earlier incarnations of that organisation, was a purely political movement whereas that of the 1970’s was built around a catholic population under attack. The followers of the republican cult might well have wished it otherwise, but the muscle of the movement that emerged out of the early stages of the recent troubles was catholic and sectarian. Today the question is changed, changed dramatically, and mutations of the Provisionals, like the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA represent nothing but the pale ghosts of yesterday. They are a curse on the body politic and the only progressive act they can commit is to disappear.



The “Great” are only great because ruling-class historians tell us they are.

Great men and disproportionately fewer great women are defined and refined for us by those whom we deem to be worthy of lording it over us every four or five years. They stand upon manifestos that promise much but deliver little. What they do deliver, but never talk about beforehand, is war or conflict, reduced public services, cronyism, personal enrichment, self aggrandisement *and* the ability to write or rewrite history. “He who controls the present controls the past. He who controls the past controls the future!” as Orwell memorably wrote.

So, the history books of our nation-states are filled with tales of derring-do by champions of our establishment class; pages are given over to the wisdom and fortitude during times of conflict of our political leaders. Pages are dedicated to politicians and generals who, by and large, seldom or never come within range of an armed enemy. In contrast, “the poor, bloody infantry” get a line or two when mention of casualties is glossed over. Churchill stayed in London during the blitz, a political decision, to boost morale in the civil population but was in a hole so deep under the Admiralty as to warrant honorary membership of the National Union of Mineworkers, a group he had once turned armed troops upon for daring to defy the Establishment. Yet he, along with others like him, are perceived by many to be great.

Lloyd George

David Lloyd George – the “Welsh Wizard”, so named for his fine oratory and political acumen, but despised by political friend and foe alike for his deceit and cunning – became Prime Minister in 1916 having schemed the downfall of his then Liberal Party leader and Prime Minister Lord Asquith.

At the conclusion of The Great War, in opposition to former allies the US, France and Italy, he set about the punishment of what he referred to as the “deplorable Turks” by the dismemberment of Turkey and what remained of the former Ottoman Empire whilst at the same time serving Britain’s imperial aims in the region. Part of his strategy was to encourage then Greek Prime Minister, Venizelos, whom Lloyd George considered “the greatest statesman Greece had thrown up since Pericles”, to attack mainland Turkey and establish a Greater Hellene Empire. In the event his strategy failed; thousands died needlessly on both sides of the conflict, animosity simmers between Greece and Turkey to this day and with the exchange of populations in 1926 formerly mixed and peaceful communities were torn apart, friends were made into strangers and enemies.

Within days of the signing in 1922 of the articles of agreement between Turkey and the British, French and Italians for full withdrawal of troops (the French and Italians were long-gone and the Greeks were defeated), Lloyd George resigned, forced out by colleagues who “[could] not afford to keep him anymore. He is too expensive.” The legacy of David Lloyd George is one of death and destruction, of double-dealing and strategic failure. And yet the casual reader of history would see him writ large as a statesman and master politician. There is page after page in the “official” history books and biographies and even a parody of a repetitious song.

Granny Ayse

Compare this with the story of Ayse (pronounced. Aysher) of Kaya village near Fethiye in SW Turkey. (I am indebted to long-term resident of Kaya, John Laughland for much of the following information contained in his moving tribute-cum-obituary) She died on 20th March 2009, in Izmir, aged around 104, although records and registrations in those days were not punctiliously kept. As she grew older she became known as



Aysenine "Granny Ayse" and she was greatly loved by those who knew her. All of her life was spent in the Kaya valley until about five years ago when infirmity dictated that she move from her tumbledown house to the care of her family in Izmir. When she married she moved from one area of this small valley to another and knew little of the world outside. Hers was the life of a village smallholder, working to provide for her family and herself. Some would say she led an unremarkable life of little note or consequence and yet her face has featured in a book that records "Fethiye Faces and Places" by Turkish photographer Faruk Akbas, poems have been inspired by her words and two renowned authors, Jeremy Seal (in *Santa; A Life*) and Louis de Bernieres (in *Birds Without Wings*) have written about her and her life and you might ask why. (de Bernieres is presently work-

ing on a screenplay for "*Birds Without Wings*")

Ayse lived through and dealt with the consequences of David Lloyd George's arrogance and perfidy; she was about seventeen years old when the exchange of populations took place. When asked of her memory of those awful times, when friends and neighbours were torn apart, she responded "The cats were crying." There were some 500 houses in what is now known as Kaya village, formerly Levissi, which remain empty to this

day, and it's probable that hundreds of cats in need of food were left behind. Ayse kept in trust the wedding chest of her Greek childhood friend Maria in the belief that one day they would be reunited and it could be returned. Her integrity, honesty and trust, her faith in her fellow human beings are in direct contrast to the murderous contempt for the lives of others that is the legacy of Lloyd George.

Those who knew Granny Ayse remember her golden personality and sparkling wit that made her a pleasure to be around. Popular history through photos, poems, books and films will record her real greatness as a starring member of the human race; someone who contributed to the well of human kindness and left the world a better place for having lived. David Lloyd George on the other hand is remembered as a cunning bombast with the blood of thousands on his hands, a failure who contributed nothing of value. He may feature in the "official" histories bathing in perceived greatness but Ayse lives on in the hearts and memories of so many because she contributed so much and represented the true nature of humanity.

Newspeak

Seldom do "histories" reflect reality; in the US there lives a species known as Political Historian whose job it is to address the problems that actual recorded facts cause to the established ruling elite. No doubt they thrive in most other nation states in one guise or another drip-feeding us and our kids via schools and the media with their perceived version of reality. NEWSPEAK is alive and well all over the world. As memories of recent events fade the Political Historians will wave their wands and Bush and Blair et al will transmogrify into great leaders who saved civilisation yet again from the barbarians. Records go missing, new facts are added and repeated over and over in the spirit of Dr Goebbels and the Ministry of Truth.

As socialists we understand only too well the power of oft repeated misinformation in the minds of many people; when people understand the real nature of our philosophy as opposed to their perceived notions drip-fed to them via the establishment then the system will come crashing. Our task is to keep our own candle burning and to "make socialists" whenever and wherever we can. The values of Ayse of Kaya sustained her as she waited for the return of her friend; the values and integrity of our World Socialist Movement sustain each of us as we battle the legacy of David Lloyd George, the Establishment and the spin of the Political Historians.

ALAN FENN



The Greek Prime Minister, Venizelos, c.1920

It's election time again

The Socialist Party will be standing in the elections to the European Parliament on 4 June. These elections will be held under a system of proportional representation and the whole of Greater London will be a single constituency. We will be presenting a full list of 8 candidates. There are over 5 million electors in London. Which will be the largest number of workers up to now who will be faced with possibility of voting for world socialism. Below is the socialist manifesto on which our candidates will be standing.

Every few years groups of professional politicians compete for your vote to win themselves a comfortable position, this time in the European Parliament. All of the other parties and candidates offer only minor changes to the present system. That is why whichever candidate or party wins there is no significant change to the way things are. Promises are made and broken, targets are set and not reached, statistics are selected and spun.

All politicians assume that capitalism is the only game in town, although they may criticise features of its unacceptable face, such as greedy bankers, or the worst of its excesses, such as unwinnable wars. They defend a society in which we, the majority of the population, must sell our capacity to work to the tiny handful who own most of the wealth. They defend a society in which jobs are offered only if there is a profit to be made.

Real socialism

The Socialist Party urges a truly democratic society in which people take all the decisions that affect them. This means a society without rich and poor, without owners and workers, without governments and governed, a society without leaders and led.

In such a society people would cooperate to use all the world's natural and industrial resources in their own interests. They would free production from the artificial restraint of profit and establish a system of society in which each person has free access to the benefits of civilisation. Socialist society would consequently mean the end of buying, selling and exchange, an end

to borders and frontiers, an end to organised violence and coercion, waste, want and war.

What you can do

You can vote for candidates who will work within the capitalist system and help keep it going. Or you can use your vote to show you want to overturn it and end the problems it causes once and for all.

When enough of us join together, determined to end inequality and deprivation, we can transform elections into a means of doing away with a society of minority rule in favour of a society of real democracy and social equality.

If you agree with the idea of a society of common and democratic ownership where no one is left behind and things are produced because they are needed, and not to make a profit for some capitalist corporation, and are prepared to join with us to achieve this then vote for the SOCIALIST PARTY list.

The election will of course be taken place outside London too, in fact in most of Europe. To take account of this, our manifesto will be translated into German, French, Spanish, Italian and Swedish and distributed by socialists there as well as being published on the website of the World Socialist Movement at www.worldsocialism.org. In the rest of Britain, and in Ireland, the following leaflet will be distributed.

Flying pigs and the Euro elections

You might have heard of the Euro elections, the biggest in history, 500 million people, 27 countries, June 4th? You're supposed to choose which of your local crème-de-la-crème get to go on

free holidays to Brussels and Strasbourg, and the powers that be are a bit worried that you won't take it seriously enough to bother voting. Shame on you!

Just to show how desperately important all this is, here's a few ways in which the European Parliament has recently changed your life enormously:

- working time directives limiting your weekly hours to 48 (but don't worry, the UK government opted out of that one pretty smartly).

- all-inclusive air-fare prices (for those of you frequently travelling to Brussels and Strasbourg...).

- REACH directive on industrial chemical use.

- roaming mobile phone directives (for those of you frequently travelling to Brussels and Strasbourg...).

Alright, not very Earth-shaking, admittedly. If you're struggling to make ends meet on benefits, or facing redundancy or any of the hundred problems workers are always having, these are probably not the issues that will drag you out to the polling booth.

The fact is, the whole Euro show is not really designed to do anything for YOU, it's just designed to stop the big Ruling Piggies from going to war with each other, like they did in the two World Wars. Though it's a good idea to avoid wars, since it's always workers who end up suffering, it's really the expense that bothers them, not your welfare. If they make the Euro-trough big enough, goes the thinking, they can all shove in their snouts without getting in each other's way. It's all about the money, surprise surprise. While money and capitalism exist, it always will be.

You might think, especially with this

economic depression, that capitalism does nothing but make a slave out of you, and that it's only the rich that benefit. If your local candidates are not saying this, why bother voting for them? Well, better to make a statement than stay silent. All you have to do is write something rude across your ballot paper, or if you prefer, 'Abolish money and capitalism' or 'World Socialism, common ownership and democratic control', if it'll fit. A vote's always worth using, even when there's nobody worth voting for.

And when you've done that, go and find some like-minded people at www.worldsocialism.org.

MEETINGS

Speakers Corner, Marble arch, Hyde Park. Every Sunday from 10am. Speakers:

Danny Lambert, Bill Martin, Adam Buick.

Sunday 17 May, 6pm

YOUR CHANCE TO VOTE FOR WORLD SOCIALISM

Speakers: Danny Lambert, Tristan Miller

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North).

Tuesday 19 May, 8pm

YOUR CHANCE TO VOTE FOR WORLD SOCIALISM

Speakers: Simon Wigley, Adam Buick

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W3 (nearest tube: Chiswick Park).

Saturday 30 May, from 10 am onwards

OPEN DAY AND BOOK SALE

A chance to meet socialists and discuss socialist ideas and to see how we are organised and what we do.

At 52 Clapham High Street, SW4.

Summer School 2009 Revolution

The Socialist Party of Great Britain advocates a democratic, classless society without money, leaders and private ownership of the means of production. To reach this new society, nothing short of a complete change to our social institutions is needed: a revolution. However, the SPGB doesn't aim to lead us there – a socialist revolution could only happen if the vast majority wants it and works towards it.

But what is a revolution? An event? A process? A mindset? Have there ever been any revolutions which have close similarities to what a socialist revolution could be? How does the SPGB's view of revolution differ from that of other organisations? Has the current state of society pushed us further towards or away from revolution?

This year's Summer School weekend of talks and discussion will tackle the theme of revolution – a central aspect of socialist theory which also remains elusive.

Our venue, Harborne Hall conference and training centre, is within easy reach of Birmingham city centre, the M5 and the M42. Full directions will be sent with each booking.

Residential attendance (£140) includes accommodation and all meals Friday evening until Sunday afternoon. Non-residential attendance (£55) includes lunch on Saturday and Sunday. Half-price rates are available to concessions.

To confirm your booking, send a cheque for £10 (made out to the Socialist Party of Great Britain), with your contact details and whether you are booking residential or non-residential attendance, to flat 2, 24 Tedstone Road, Quinton, Birmingham, B32 2PD. Enquiries to Mike at spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk



Capitalism, but not as they know it

Eric Hobsbawm and Amartya Sen have both written interesting stuff. Hobsbawm on the history of capitalism in Britain and Sen on how famines are not caused by a shortage of food but by the collapse of some people's legal entitlement to it. But their comments on the current crisis are confused.

In an article in the *New York Review of Books* (www.nybooks.com/articles/22490), reprinted in the *Guardian* (14 March), entitled "Capitalism Beyond the Crisis", Sen questions "whether capitalism is a term that is of particular use today", arguing:

"It seems to be generally assumed that relying on markets for economic transactions is a necessary condition for an economy to be identified as capitalist. In a similar way, dependence on the profit motive and on individual rewards based on private ownership are seen as archetypal features of capitalism. However, if these are necessary requirements, are the economic systems we currently have, for example, in Europe and America, genuinely capitalist?"

Citing increased state funding over the years of the armed forces, the police, health and education as examples of non-market, non-profit economic activities, he concludes: "the idea of capitalism did in fact have an important role historically, but by now that usefulness may well be fairly exhausted".

The market and profits certainly are central to capitalism, and state spending certainly has increased compared with some past periods, but is state spending really non-capitalist or is it not rather part of the necessary overheads of running capitalism? Capitalism and the state have always co-existed. In fact the state helped capitalism come into existence and expand and is needed to maintain it today. State spending on armed and police forces is patently aimed at serving capitalist interests at home and abroad. State spending on education and health is essentially aimed at providing employers with a fit and trained workforce and so too is pro-capitalist.

Hobsbawm also thinks we should be looking towards a society that is neither capitalist nor socialist, as in the title – "Socialism has failed. Now capitalism is bankrupt. So what comes next?" – of a recent article of his in the *Guardian* (10 April) brings out. But his definition of capitalism is as wrong as his definition of socialism. He contrasts "the centrally state-planned economics of the Soviet type and the totally unrestricted and uncontrolled free-market capitalist economy".

Arguments can go on about whether Russia was some form of capitalism or some new exploitative class society, but it was clearly not a classless society based on the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources with production directly to meet human needs and not for sale on a market, i.e. not socialism.

The case for saying that it was still a form of capitalism – best described as state capitalism – is that wealth there still took the form of "an immense accumulation of commodities" as articles for sale, produced by a class of people obliged to sell their working skills for a wage or a salary on whose unpaid labour a privileged class lived.

As an historian of capitalism Hobsbawm must know that, if defined as a "totally unrestricted and uncontrolled free-market" economy, "capitalism" has never existed because there never has been a time when market forces alone have exclusively determined how an economy has worked. States have always intervened to try to distort the market in favour of particular capitalist groups as well as to engage in the activities Sen mentions.

As class ownership, production for sale with a view to a profit, wage labour and surplus value still exist – as they patently do, whatever the degree of state activity – "capitalism" is the best term for describing the existing economic and social system.



reporting when restricted by the use of reactionary values and language. It is the nature of language to struggle to find new concepts and

Why are high house prices and high profits considered good news?

Whose news?

We are all used to hearing from the TV or radio that what we are about to experience is the 'news'. Proceeded by a little tune supposed to promote gravitas and/or imply the very latest fast technological process of newsgathering we are presented with a sober middle-class gent or couple sporting sensible hair, grey suits and dazzling white smiles. A stranger to our culture may be very surprised that whichever channel is chosen the content of the news is almost identical. Indeed the choice of headlines is nearly always the same; a little odd considering that in this country we have over 100 digital channels! What can be the reason for such a strange phenomena? Could it be that there is total unanimity concerning what is important in human behaviour (this would be the only example of such total agreement within our species) or is there some agenda shared by those who own and operate our media?

It would be fair to say that the mainstream media in this country (TV, radio and newspapers) are owned by a tiny minority. Socialists have always maintained that the media's obsessions reflect those of the ruling class who own them. The fact that high house prices and high profits are considered good news when it is the majority who are exploited even more as a result gives you an idea of the values shared by the owners of the media. The main disagreements (at least within the newspapers) concern the different commercial interests within the owning class – the dreary and unending European Union debate being an obvious example.

Another element that is thought to contribute to the 'news' is topicality – the story should reflect a perspective on a contemporary value or popular obsession. For our general readers it is obviously important that our analysis should begin with a reflection on contemporary events. However part of that analysis for us is a proof of the illusion of novelty/topicality of events within the anachronistic culture of capitalism.

A friend of mine has recently given up his subscription to a newspaper on the grounds that it merely repeats the same old propaganda values whatever the story. This is the essence of 'the news' in today's media. It seeks only to find different stories to 'prove' its own value system. The 'credit crunch' is either the result of greedy bankers or lack of government supervision of the financial services. It could never be a proof of the instability and irrational nature of capitalism itself.

There arises an inevitable contradiction within journalism between the observation of change and its

metaphors to describe the changing world we live in. When change is accelerated during a revolutionary period this tension can create linguistic confusion and creativity (Christopher Hill's book *The World Turned Upside Down* illustrates this wonderfully using examples from the English Revolution).

It is important to emphasise that propaganda is not always consciously produced by a conspiracy of journalists and press barons. I remember Michael Parkinson saying that he never experienced owner/editorial interference during his journalistic career. This, of course, merely emphasises the care taken to employ only political 'fellow travellers' rather than proof of the non-propagandist nature of the media. Within the commercial media the usual worker and owner tension can destroy real journalism under the profit and propaganda imperatives of our authoritarian culture.

What is really corrosive to good journalism is to be completely unaware of the political bias that is inherent in any interpretation of events (the news). Of course this is to give the benefit of the doubt to journalists and not to accuse them of downright lies. My father once found himself, in his role as a union shop steward, in the centre of a local news story. After an interview he gave to a journalist he was outraged by what was subsequently printed. This was, in part, testament to his political naivety but it also emphasises that what is printed must fit within the propaganda value of 'the story' even if this necessitates downright lies.

What would qualify as news for a future socialist media? Of course when we are in a position to produce stories for the mass media the world will begin to be a very different place. Reporting will surely emphasise the relationship between the rising political awareness of the population and the activities this provokes. Presumably what remains of the present media will portray the changing political landscape as a disaster for the world and everyone in it. A socialist media will initially have to counter this increasingly hysterical propaganda. Then the production of a forum for debate will become ever more important as the need for information to make democratic decisions becomes vital.

As the need to counter reactionary propaganda recedes then the media will transform itself into a vehicle of information and entertainment. Because the need for 'escapist' entertainment will also recede I suspect a different, possibly more 'mature' kind of fiction will replace it. I hope to live to see a world where fictional characters deal with important political dilemmas rather than personal and romantic ones. And what of sports? I hear the reader say fearfully. Perhaps, at last, competition between those who wish to compete will be confined to the sports arena where they belong. By this time your writer will be enjoying a cricket game in Jamaica in his role as your Caribbean sports reporter (editors permitting).

WEZ

How I got to be a socialist

"I could hardly fail to notice that all was not well with the world of the mid-seventies".

All of a sudden, it hits you. Overnight you go from saying "Yes, it all sounds very nice, but we're all too greedy. What would happen if everybody wanted three televisions?" to realizing that there's just no other way to sort out the world's problems.

I don't know how common it is to catch socialism from your father but that's what happened in my case.

When younger my father had been a member of the British Communist Party. Generally, he seems to have kept his political activities low-key (the only controversy I know about is when, shortly after he had married a catholic girl from Italy, the local priest apparently created a bit of a fuss when, on a house visit, he found a CP newspaper lying around).

But he evidently became disillusioned with the CP. Certainly while I was growing up I only remember him voting Labour. Then, in the 70s, he started buying the *Socialist Standard* and joined the Socialist Party not long after. He got a few other people interested and soon they had formed the West Yorkshire branch. I was back home temporarily after studying and working in London and he used to keep the latest *Socialist Standard* in prominent view somewhere around the house. I later discovered that this had been with the express intention of getting me interested. I did read it at times but I thought it was all rubbish. What particularly annoyed me was his parting shots at the end of seemingly every news bulletin, "It wouldn't be like that if we had socialism".

I wasn't remotely interested in politics. In the late sixties, as a student, I had totally failed to understand what all the unrest was about. I couldn't see that the students had the answer to anything. During the recession of the early seventies, some of my friends talked about an impending apocalypse – things were going to get much worse – so, I thought, if we're all going to die then fine. I'll take some tins of food and hide somewhere.

But I could hardly fail to notice that all was not well with the world of the mid-seventies. And what with hearing my father talking to his socialist friends, and running out of answers to the things they said to



me, and surreptitiously reading more and more of the *Standard*, suddenly socialism all started to make sense and I was hooked.

This happened the same year I started to work for a large multinational company. Before, I would have dreaded the thought of this. I had read a book by Marcuse about technology and society, which contributed to my growing dread of the modern world, but socialism provided me with the perfect context for it all, a way of seeing through the madness. I now knew what these large organizations were about and they no longer scared me.

I joined the Socialist Party and started going to branch meetings; far from being a publication of the lunatic fringe, the *Socialist Standard* became my monthly dose of sanity.

I stayed with the same company, in IT, for 28 years, doing a more or less 9 to 5 job, and every few years surviving the inevitable re-organisation and accompanying job cuts. By the time I finished, the structure of the IT department was back more or less to what it had been like when I started, only with about a quarter of the people. I think it would all have been too horrifying without the large pinch of salt that my membership of the socialist movement provided. I actually enjoyed the job most of the time – but it was always with the constant thinking against the grain, the

knowledge that the world could be so much better, that socialism provides.

Why don't more people become socialists?

Unfortunately, thoughts of building a world that is radically different don't feature much on people's agenda. Capitalism always throws other imperatives at them and there's always another day to get through. I think I was lucky in that at the time I started to think about socialism, I was "between jobs", single and without any particular commitments. And for all that they may bewail their lot and want to see something done about the injustices in the world, people feel uncomfortable if anything threatens to disrupt their everyday routines and thought processes. It's easier to complain than to be constructive. It's also quite a jolt to be told that we can scrap money, employment and governments. People think they are going to "lose all they've worked for", to go back to a more primitive, barter-like existence. And unless world leaders and celebrities get behind some cause or other, it's not regarded as important.

But once you see that socialism is the only sensible way forward, no other view of the world makes sense. For all that socialists might despair from time to time of ever getting there – just ask – what's the alternative?

ROD SHAW

Crassness

An educational dialogue explaining the workings of modern capitalism and rebellion, based on genuine events.

Scene: An alternative bar in North London. Cool movie posters plaster the walls. Electronic music pumps out unusually quiet from speakers – it is a week day evening.

Enter Pik Smeet, wearing broad brimmed hat, trying to look like a Puritan. He approaches the bar, buys a bottle of cider, and sits at his chair of many years usage. After him, come two middle-aged male punks, spikey haired, leather-clad with tattoos and chains strewn around their bodies – back from smoking outside. They sit around the corner of the bar from Comrade Smeet.

Punk 1: ...So, my boss says, when you've got all the money in, that's it, you can go home.
Punk 2: Gah! Like I need another reason to hate you – easy street.
Punk 1: Yeah, I hate me too. We own market places all over London. Go round, collect the cash, nice little job.
Punk 2: Bet you get a stack of griping from all the stallholders.
Punk 1: That's why I don't hang around after I've picked up the rent.
Punk 2: Too right. You have many places?
Punk 1: Yeah, Camden, Oxford Street, Piccadilly Circus. All over the joint. Going to be more now, we've just bought out a former Woolworths store, now they've collapsed.
Punk 2: Oh, really, what you going to do with that?
Punk 1: Well, unless a big firm comes along and makes us an offer, we're gonna turn it into small units. You make more money breaking big stores up into units, see. Could get you a place if you fancy one.
Punk 2: Well, I'm only interested as a customer.
Punk 1: Ah, well, then, you'll like our night clubs. They're good money too – we have a chain of clubs, you know the ones, one near Farringdon.
Punk 2: Oh, them – the strip places?
Punk 1: Well, call them night clubs, but, basically, well, they're brothels. Then, that's where the money is.
Punk 2: Yeah – you should try working in making porn films, I make good money shooting them.
Punk 1: Well, I used to, but I got out because the money isn't there any more. And, y'know, that's why you do it, I mean, it's fun, you get to travel the world, but the bottom line is the money. If you're not making any, there's no point doing it.
Punk 2: You reckon?
Punk 1: Yeah. You see, America – yer biggest market, y'know, they won't allow you to import films any more. And you can't get a visa to enter the states and shoot the films. That's it, no point being in the game any more.
Punk 2: Well, I still make good money – hand over fist – I think you should have stuck with it, mate, it's a good

game – so long as it's not the only thing you can do.
Punk 1: That reminds me – one girl, we were driving her round London, showing her some sites, got to Trafalgar square, I said "And that's Nelson's column" she said to me "Who?" I mean, totally dumb – nothing else she could do than be in the business.

Punk 2: Was she English?

Punk 1: Perfectly, girl next door. The quality product, not one of your Eastern European girls.

Punk

2: Ooh, the very thing. Mind you, when

I was living above the brothel your English birds would last until lunchtime, and when there wasn't plenty of food forthcoming, they'd be off out the door. Least the eastern birds have to hang around.

Punk 1: On our shoots we'd have about four hundred quid a week to just send out to Sainsbury's for food. We were a big crew, so, you know, we'd all need feeding.

Twelve hours a day we were doing – a laugh. I know, half hour bursts of work, but we were there for the whole long day. Great fun.

Punk 2: Have you tried flogging your stuff over the internet?

Punk 1: That's just it – who wants to pay forty quid for hardcore pornography when you can download stacks of it for virtually nothing.

Punk 2: Well, you get to control your own business, from beginning to end – production and distribution – everything except the credit card payments – you need someone else to do that –

Punk 1: Usually from Russia.

Punk 2: You have to be careful with them, but, yes, the Russians can help you with the financial side of things.

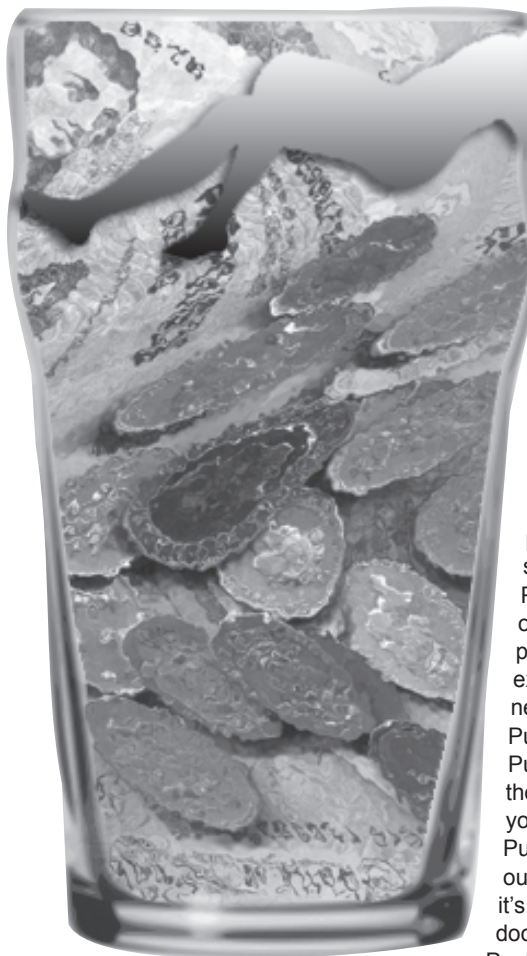
Punk 1: Y' See, I mean, the technology is out there, anyone can make porn – and it's the home-made look, with the girl next door, that really draws in the punters.

Punk 2: That's what we're good at doing – your punters want realistic-looking sex, and

we do home-made look quite well. It's a skill to achieve that look. That's what we bring – technology is cheapening the production process, but we still add value through our skills.
Punk 1: Well, the value we add gets less all the time, I reckon I'm better off collecting the rent. Right, next fag.

Punk 1 stands up, on his shirt is sewn a badge with a picture of Karl Marx, over his heart. He pulls on his studded leather jacket, and goes out for a smoke.

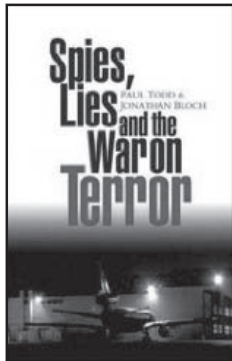
Smeet (to himself): Well, that's punk for you, rebellion within capitalism – non-conformity can be highly profitable. Reckon I'll go home and write all this down – a little morality play full of symbolic resonances and the like.



Watching over us

Spies, Lies and the War on Terror.

By Paul Todd, Jonathan Bloch and Patrick Fitzgerald: Zed Books £14.99.



The 'Cold War' has been replaced by the 'War on Terror' as a means of defending the interests of Western capitalism. The identification of a new enemy has paralleled an enormous increase in

the amount of snooping that goes on, with governments spying ever more closely on their own citizens. These are the kinds of developments chronicled in this volume.

For the United States in particular, the gathering of intelligence has come to serve the purpose of pre-emptive war, aimed at stopping any perceived threat to the power of the capitalist class before it can be put into action. This may involve 'creative destruction' in the Middle East (a term coined by an American neo-con, not by the authors). The idea of a US military presence in the Middle East became a long-term goal, eventually realised in Iraq. In fact, intelligence is sometimes massaged (as with Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction) or deliberately ignored. Consequently much US policy backfires, as when Iran has benefited from the elimination of regional rivals (the Taliban in Afghanistan, and Saddam).

At the same time, and as state and corporate intelligence functions increasingly merge, domestic spying is becoming more and more pervasive. The National Security Agency in the US, for instance, has been monitoring all phone calls made to overseas, and the president has powers to authorise surveillance without a warrant. Sometimes the information recorded is laughable, with Quaker meetings logged as 'suspicious incidents', but the spread of government intrusion into people's lives is no laughing matter.

Similar developments have been taking place in the UK, with increased powers for the police and much so-called anti-terrorist legislation. There have been arrests of people (as in a supposed bomb plot

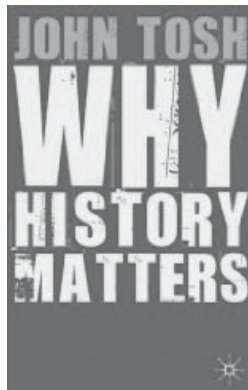
in Manchester in 2004 and one in East London in 2006), accompanied by lurid press speculation and much disinformation from police sources; in neither case was any evidence found, and the arrested were released without charge. Lengthy detention was introduced for those who had not done anything, just supposedly threatened to undertake some action designed to advance a political cause.

The War on Terror, then, not only results in killings on a massive scale in Iraq, Afghanistan and so on, in the interests of Western, specifically American, power. It also leads to the creation and expansion of databases containing enormous amounts of information on people, information that we cannot access, let alone challenge, even if we know it's there. This book gives a detailed and frightening account of how and why this is happening.

PB

History matters

Why History Matters by John Tosh, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008



At the completion of the invasion of Iraq in July 2003, British Prime Minister Tony Blair gave a speech to the US Congress in which he declared:

"There has never been a time ... when, except in the most general sense, a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day" (Quoted by Tosh, p.5). Gordon Brown, with a Ph.D in history and current Prime Minister, supported that invasion.

Blair was probably speaking out of ignorance rather than deceit, for that was not the first time British military forces had invaded Iraq. In 1914 Britain acted alone in invading Iraq (then called Mesopotamia) to drive out the Ottoman Turks. Britain then administered Iraq as a Mandate of the League of Nations until 1934, and remained in a position of informal influence until the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in 1958. Strategic interests were the initial motivation for the invasion,

but important oil reserves were known to exist. As Marian Kent's study of this period shows, "by 1920 Mesopotamian oil ... had come to occupy a major place in British military and diplomatic concerns in the Middle East" (*Oil and Empire: British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil, 1900-1920*, 1976. Quoted by Tosh, p.2). History matters.

Politicians are often ill-informed, but Alan Greenspan, the long-time head of the US central bank, admitted that the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq was really aimed at protecting Middle East oil reserves. "I thought the issue of weapons of mass destruction as the excuse was utterly beside the point", he said (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,2170602,00.html>). How are we to explain these events? What processes are involved and what is a proper historical perspective? For John Tosh, a professional historian, "public history" matters because it can provide the basis for informed and critical understanding of the present. But there is no place for causation in this understanding of history: the invasions of Iraq in 1914 and 2003 were wars for oil, as Tosh would probably agree, but for him the causes were unique and all we can learn from history is their similarities and differences: there is no underlying structural cause. This is an unconvincing and inadequate theory of history given the regular occurrence of wars and other social problems thrown up by capitalism. History matters more than that.

Socialists have a materialist conception of history in which we view the past in the context of the development of the forces of production (productive technology) and relations of production (economic classes), and analyse social development to better understand the present and possible futures. The state and its machinery of government have historically favoured the interests of the economically dominant class - presently the capitalist class. It is in their interests that wars have been prosecuted in Iraq for oil, or for their strategic interests as in Afghanistan. This follows a regular pattern in capitalism, and using a materialist historical perspective we can see the capitalist process at work and predict that as long as we have capitalism we will have wars. We cannot predict where and when, but they will happen: the forces and classes driving history will always make them likely, and since the end of the Second World War there has always

been a war being fought somewhere in the world. An understanding of the materialist conception of history would provide a rational motivation for revolutionary political action by us, the subordinate class in society, to end capitalism as the cause of war in the modern world. History matters because your life may depend on it.
LEW

Too late?

Too Little, Too Late. The Politics of Climate Change. By Colin Challen. Picnic. 2009. £9.99.



It's not going to happen. CO₂ emissions are not going to peak by 2015 which, according to some scientists, will mean that the average world temperature

will rise by more than 2°C by the end of the century. *Will* rise? Actually, what the scientists say is that, according to the assumptions of their computer models, there is a high probability that this will happen. It is not a definite prediction. It is only amateur environmentalist campaigners who say that it will happen and that the end of the world is just about nigh.

The fact is that we don't really know. We don't know how realistic the scientists' models really are and we don't know what other, relevant events might happen between now and 2100, including what people and governments might do. To influence governments to do something is of course why campaigners sometimes exaggerate the dangers. They may well sincerely believe their own exaggerations.

If you really believe that civilization will collapse in 2100 as a consequence of the effects of global warming, then it's logical for you to see this as the only issue worth campaigning on. You will be led, like James Lovelock, author of the Gaia hypothesis, to embrace nuclear power despite its dangers as the main alternative source to burning fossil fuels for generating electricity. Or, like the author of this book, Colin Challen, Labour MP for Morley and Rothwell and chairman of the All Party Climate Change group,

to envisage a coalition government and a committee presided over by the monarch – King Charles III? – to deal with the issue. You will certainly tell us – as we were told by CND in the 1960s – that we can't wait for socialism as this won't come in time, so that we should suspend campaigning for socialism in favour of campaigning on the single issue of climate change.

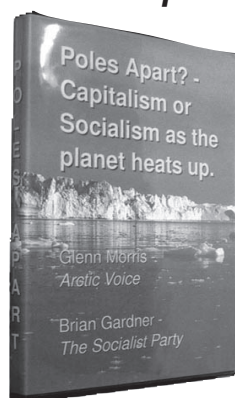
But this is to assume that this could be avoided without getting rid of capitalism. Challen himself provides grounds for seriously doubting this: that, in intergovernmental negotiations, "trade always trumps conservation" (p. 71) and that competition impedes agreement ("Nobody wants to see their economy damaged by another's which itself does not face the extra costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions", p. 93).

Which is why he himself is rather pessimistic about the prospects of CO₂ emissions peaking by 2015. But even on the worst scenario – rising sea levels, displacement of populations, shifts in the balance of geopolitics – only socialism would provide the framework for dealing with the problems.

ALB

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Poles Apart? Capitalism or Socialism as the planet heats up



with contributions from Glenn Morris, Arctic Voice, and Brian Gardner, The Socialist Party.

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Meetings

Capitalism in Crisis: A May Day School for Socialism

Saturday **2 May** 10.30am till 6.00pm
The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street SW4 7UN Tube: Clapham North

IS THE PROFIT SYSTEM WORKING?

1. Capitalism & Economics - Brian Gardner (Glasgow Socialist Party)
 2. Capitalism, Resources and the Environment - Gwynn Thomas (South London Socialist Party)
 3. Capitalism & Society - Simon Wigley
- Food and Refreshments will be available.
The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street SW4 Tube: Clapham North.

Details of London European Election campaign meetings can be found on page 16.

East Anglia

Sunday **3 May**, 12 noon to 4pm
BRANCH MEETING
Reindeer Pub, 10 Dereham Road.
Norwich NR2 4RY

Saturday **30 May**, 2 - 5pm
"What are the similarities and differences between the Socialist Party and Anarchist positions?"
Public Debate between the Anarchist Federation and the Socialist Party:
Room 1.33 Union House University of East Anglia.

Glasgow

Day School, Saturday **9 May** 1pm to 5pm
FAT CAT BANKERS LINE UP FOR HANDOUTS
FAT CHANCE FOR WORKERS
1 pm The Year of Economic Crisis (Brian Gardner)
2.15 The Environment in Meltdown (John Cumming)
3.45 Can Socialism Solve the Problems? (Paul Bennett)
Community Central Halls, 304 Marhill Road (5 minutes from St. George's Cross underground station).

Edinburgh

Wednesday **27, May**, 7.30 pm
Free Access Now - Is it possible?
Venue: ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh.

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Lothians Discussion Group

(under the auspices of the Socialist Party's Edinburgh Branch)

Venue: ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh

Every 4th Wednesday of the Month

Time: 7.30pm-9.00pm

Contact:

Fraser Anderson: Fraser@prolerat.org

Jimmy Moir: jimmy@prolerat.org

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New Pamphlet

An Inconvenient Question:
Socialism and the Environment



see order form on page 9 for details

Socialist Standard

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Turmoil in Tibet



THE REBELLION in Tibet, its draconian suppression, and the escape of the Dalai Lama, have exploded like a star-shell to illuminate a world in the Iron Curtain's dark shadow. Events in Tibet have been compared with the recent suppression in Hungary and while there is a resemblance, both revolts and the backgrounds have been reported everywhere fogged with misunderstanding or misrepresentation by people who do not seem to have a clue as to what the factors are that make society tick. (...)

Most of the 4,500,000 Tibetans actually live within the confines of China in the areas bordering on Tibet. Only about 1,000,000 live in Tibet proper, under political allegiance to Lhasa. Their social classification is roughly: 50,000 nobles and merchants, 150,000 monks, 800,000 serfs. About one-seventh of the population is in the monasteries—more than one man in four. Those who

are not in the church have mostly swallowed the religious bait, hook, line and sinker, and live in subjection to the nobles. They live, imprisoned by the ties of these religious convictions. (...)

The trouble in Tibet is a revolt of the feudal rulers against the imposed rule of State-Capitalist China—these are the transgressors in Tibet. Whichever side wins, the underprivileged on either side will still continue to be exploited, even though serfs become wage-slaves. Tibet compares with Hungary in that, once again, it is a quarrel between ruling-cliques and is not worth the shedding of one drop of workers' blood on either side.

(From article by F. Offord, *Socialist Standard*, May 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

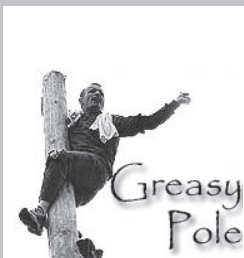
the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Bloggers at loggerheads

Advice for anyone who assess themselves as alluringly qualified to rescue the world from a deadly combination of economic disintegration and ecological catastrophe: pay heed to the example of Gordon Brown. Divesting himself of his rumoured persona of brooding neurosis occasionally relieved in volcanic tirades, the Prime Minister genially hosted the recent London G20 conference, promoted as a mechanism to flush out and eliminate every threat to the world's harmony and health. As the assembled world leaders, deaf to the clamouring protesters outside – and to the thwack of police batons on their bodies – steamrolled on, smilingly massaging each others' shoulders and self-esteem, Brown blossomed like an unusually poisonous nightshade. Around the world which the conference was supposed to have as its concern, banks and industries were choking almost to death and millions of workers were being ejected into poverty deep enough to be immediately life-threatening; meanwhile Brown went about the business of bolstering his appeal to remain as the occupant of Number Ten, strutting his fantastic stuff as the new Saviour of the World. Whether this act was effective to the extent of being sufficiently deceptive to the British electorate will be clear come the next election.

But meanwhile...

We were told that G20 would be a seminal gathering, in the sense that its terms of reference were to design a cleaner, safer world in control of its economy and its environment. As a side line its timing was clearly fortunate for Gordon Brown but his luck is not in for whatever euphoria G20 may have encouraged among Labour supporters it would have been immediately damaged by the emergence of real politics as represented by the murky strategies of governmental "advisers" Damian McBride and Derek Draper. These two set out to damage the Tory leadership through publicising some salacious allegations about them and their families. This is known as "briefing" against – another example of New Labour's distortion of the lexicon, which defines briefing as a process of summarising a clutch of complex facts into an easily assimilated and presentable form. Far from embarrassing the Tories this provoked a mass panic among the Labour benches, as one minister after another rushed to assure us that they had also been victims of such smears which, as every right-thinking person knows, should have no place in politics: "vile, horrible and despicable" raged Ed Balls – who once worked closely with McBride when they were at the Treasury with Brown as Chancellor – "we all need to work to raise standards and to stamp this out". This may have been unwelcome to McBride, who has been paid a lot of money over almost ten years to do just this kind of "work".

Draper

A similar confusion may be affecting Draper, who was abandoned to his fate by the very people in the Labour Party who until recently might have been seen as his stalwart

friends. A "special adviser" to Peter Mandelson in the early days of the Blair government, Draper's naiveté and self-regard were to cost him dear when, in 2001, he boasted to an undercover reporter that, as an intimate of the "17 people who mattered" in the government he could be trusted to arrange rewarding meetings with them. This episode revealed him to be vulnerable as well as unusually conceited; a nervous breakdown preceded him fleeing to America to train as a psychotherapist. He came back here in 2004 to set up in what is described as a "successful" psychotherapy practice (it is to be hoped that that is the opinion of his patients and not just another example of his tendency for over-positive self-assessment). Impressed, and perhaps not a little envious, of the progress up the greasy pole of some of the people – like David Miliband and Liam Byrne – he had once been on a level with, he scraped his way back into Labour politics. An invitation to lunch at Chequers last November must have convinced him that he was on his way back and earlier this year he set up the web site LabourList, with plans to open another, to be called Red Rag, to compete with the scandal aimed at Labour leaders by the Tory blog ConservativeHome. This progress – if that is what it was – came to an abrupt halt with the exposure of the e-mails between Draper and McBride.

Anger

The distasteful episode has raised a lot of anger among grass roots Labour supporters, some of whom responded to Draper's apology on LabourList: "What you have done is outrageous and disgusting, and no apology is enough" and another "You complete half-wits. Yet another weekend spent with one's head in one's hands every time the news comes on". But such people are of too humble a standing to be treated with anything other than contempt by the likes of Draper and McBride, who were more readily impressed when they were disowned by the party leaders insisting that LabourList had nothing to do with the party and that Draper was used as only a part-time volunteer – and then by Gordon Brown raging that "When I saw this first I was horrified. I was shocked and I was very angry indeed. The person who was responsible went immediately".

Such emergencies need to be understood. Those who have been immunised by experience against the conceits and fantasies of political leaders recognise that the rulers of class society can have no effect on the system which, they deceive themselves, is open to their manipulation. That is the only useful assessment of their behaviour and of their relationship with us.

IVAN



Draper, McBride & Brown



Voice from the Back

A Defender Of Capitalism

It is well known that journalists defending capitalism often make a fool of themselves. It is even better known that *Daily Mail* journalists are particularly foolish in that regard. Here is one – Andrew Alexander proving that point. “We are witnessing the death of capitalism, according to various excitable commentators, some alarmed and some drooling at the prospect. Neither need get worked up. Capitalism will survive. And it will do so because it is natural – not, as some claim, an alien system imposed on gullible people” (*Daily Mail*, 11 March). Alexander then goes on to use the hoary, old fairy tale about a shipwrecked crew on a tropical island exchanging coconuts for fish and claims this would lead to the invention of money. It is a view that completely ignores the real history of humankind. The first period of human history had no concept of private property and the invention of money is a very late development in that history. There is plenty of evidence that society has developed through various stages of primitive communism, chattel slavery, feudalism and then capitalism. Far from being “natural” capitalism is just another stage in private property society. Mr Alexander is correct in one respect though. People who imagine that the latest slump in capitalism means its termination are completely wrong. Capitalism by its very nature has slumps and booms. Its abolition will only come about with the conscious political action of the working class.

The “Lazy Man” Myth

One of the objections that socialists get when advocating a new society of common ownership and production solely for use, is that it would be impossible because of the “lazy man” who wouldn’t work. These opponents overlook the fact that socialism could only come

about when a majority were in favour of working to the best of their ability and taking according to their needs. Far from the working class being innately lazy, even inside the cut-throat system that is capitalism there are many examples of people working in a co-operative fashion. Inside families many parents sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their children, many people volunteer to do unpaid work to help the needy and the sick. Perhaps one of the best examples of selfless endeavour on behalf of others is that of lifeboat volunteers who risk their lives to help others without pay. Another opposition to a socialist society that is often aired is that is impossible because



of the existence of the “greedy man”. If the working class were really greedy they would dump a society that today leaves them in poverty while rewarding the capitalist class with immense wealth.

The Recovery Myth

“The world economy is set to shrink by between 0.5% and 1.0% in 2009, the first global contraction in 60 years. In its gloomiest forecast yet, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) says that developed countries will suffer a ‘deep recession’. The global economic body says ‘the prolonged financial crisis has battered global economic activity beyond what was previously anticipated’” (*BBC News*, 19 March). To illustrate than none of

the experts have a clue this is the same IMF that was predicting just two months earlier that world output would increase by 0.5 percent! In fact capitalism is an economic system that is based on slumps and booms and no amount of political “spin” can govern its unpredictability.

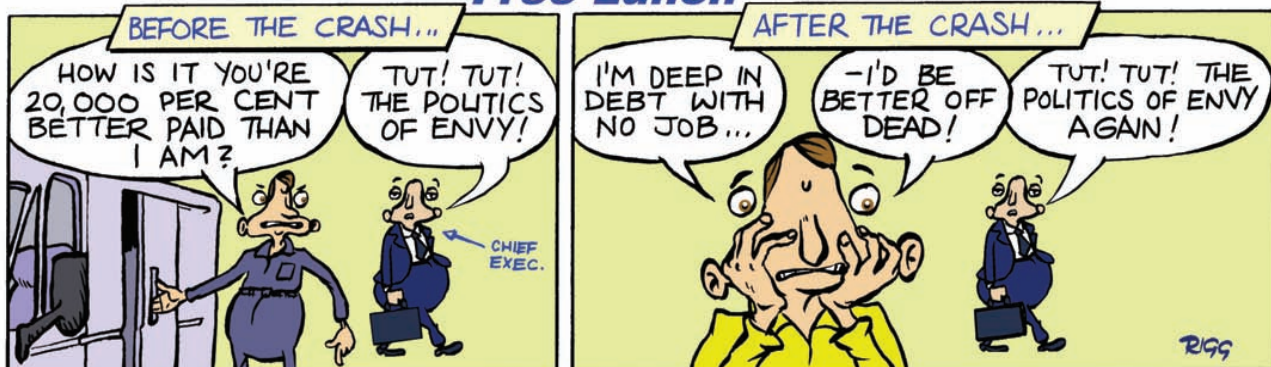
The Music Jungle

Everything inside capitalist society is driven by the profit motive. So it comes as no great surprise to hear that the popular-music industry is a victim of the rapacious demands of the commodity-producing society. Here is the highly successful pop song-writer and singer, formerly of the Eurythmics, Annie Lennox on the dog-eat-dog nature of the business. “The music industry is a bloody nightmare. The egos, the slightly criminal elements, the betrayers, the ones who want to screw you.” (*Observer*, 29 March)

World Poverty

Most people are aware of the awful poverty that exists in parts of Asia and India but capitalism is a world system with world-wide social problems. “Volunteers from one of the world’s most impoverished countries are to travel to Scotland to help people in communities blighted by drink and violence. The aid workers from Pakistan have been warned that they will see shocking poverty when they arrive next month in the east end of Glasgow to work in some of Britain’s most run-down housing schemes.... In Pakistan, a third of the 170m population lives below the poverty line – defined as earning less than \$2 (£1.36) a day. However, the average life expectancy for men is 62, compared with 54 in parts of Glasgow” (*Sunday Times*, 12 April). No doubt many of these doomed men will be singing on a Saturday night “*Glasgow Belongs To Me*”. In reality though, Glasgow – like ever city on Earth – belongs to the capitalist.

Free Lunch



socialist standard



June 2009
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Capitalism: the real swine fever



It doesn't get
any better than
this

Wait till we get
to Brussels

Bankers and politicians: so useless, you can't even eat them



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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee
will be on **Saturday 6 June** at the address
below. Correspondence should be sent to
the General Secretary. All articles, letters
and notices should be sent to the editorial
committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham
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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Crisis of legitimacy

THE EUROPEAN elections this month could not have come at a better time for a disgruntled UK electorate. While clearly fuelled by a media fresh from savaging merchant bankers and seeking new victims, the anger felt amongst the public regarding the "creativity" shown by MPs in relation to their expenses claims is undoubtedly genuine enough. Having had it confirmed recently in a government report that deprivation and inequality had risen for the third year running, the UK working class might find the maintenance costs of an MPs moat – to take just one example – a little difficult to understand.

Of course in the scheme of things, while the expenses claims make interesting reading, the whole issue is a bit of a storm in a teacup, and should be kept in some perspective. A few grand nicked here or there is crumbs compared to the wholesale legalised theft of value that occurs on payday when workers receive less than the value they have produced for their employer during that month.

Socialists have little concern for the apparent moral consistency (or otherwise) of individuals, be they MPs or not. It's the system we live under that we are interested in. As defenders of capitalism the right honourable gentlemen and ladies at Westminster have rarely been "right", and are certainly unlikely "honourable" role models. As exemplars of capitalism's principles, however they would appear to embody all the necessary tight-fisted, money-grabbing, elements.

If we didn't know it already, the last year should have taught us that capitalism is just not a "fair" system. There are many more important criticisms that can be levelled against capitalism, but the idea of "fairness" – the assumption that the society we live in should basically be a fair one, giving everyone an equal shout and an equal chance – is a political sentiment that seems to strike a very deep chord with people. On that score, capitalism is clearly found wanting.

More importantly, workers' confidence in the money system has clearly taken a significant bashing in recent months as pensions evaporate, redundancies are announced and house repossessions increase. The legitimacy of our leaders – whether business or political – is under increasing attack. Bankers have been an easy scapegoat for the fundamental failings of the economic system, capitalism. It is likely that some of that anger focussed on bankers has been generalised against those in power in the form of the political class represented at Westminster. And seldom before can the political choice provided for us have seemed so narrow. Threatened by ridicule from the public, the main political parties – between queuing up to show their contrition and denouncing their own excesses in terms reminiscent of some Maoist show trial – have spoken with one voice, the pro-capitalist voice. For brevity and clarity we can call them the Capitalist Party, the real political opponent of the Socialist Party.

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ESA's eggs in one rocket

ONE GETS so used to warnings of woe and dire prognostications that the occasional 'good news' item really stands up and waves with both hands, and lately there have been more than one such item. We have recently learned, for example, that the disaster attending the melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet might not be so bad after all (*'Ice sheet melt threat reassessed'*, BBC Online, 14 May). No indeed, instead of the sea level rising by six metres, it may only rise by three. This may not comfort the sub-sea-level Dutch, who can't afford a rise of three centimetres never mind metres, but you might be able to get by living on the first floor of your house and punting to work. Heartwarming news, too, that some species of insects are not as threatened with extinction as previously believed. "We were a bit surprised that the dragonflies are not that bad off", says one researcher (*'Dragonflies face uncertain future'*, BBC Online, 15 May). Entomologists probably won't be partying while Rome burns for mammals, birds and amphibians, who make up 63 percent of threatened species. It's just amazing that the Grim Reaper – that Horseman of the Apocalypse known as 'Capitalism' – has been so remiss as to overlook something.

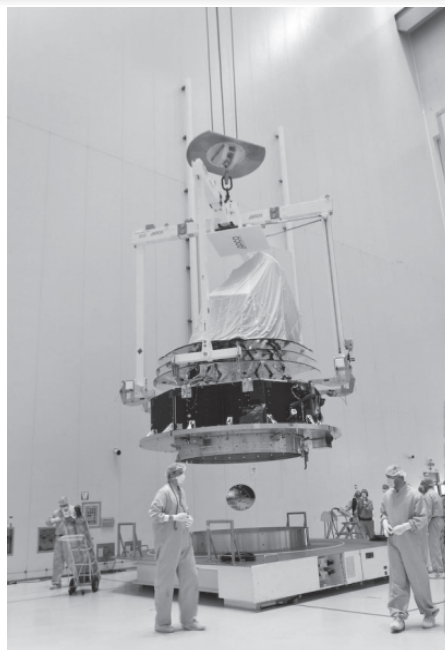
Rather more inspiring news for astronomer buffs came with the successful lifting off of the Herschel and Planck space telescopes on an Ariane 5 on 14 May. Herschel is an infra-red telescope that will see through gas and dust clouds to observe stars and galaxies being born, while Planck will study the Cosmic Microwave Background radiation, key to unlocking the secrets of the Big Bang and the proposed Inflation event, and perhaps even finding hints of earlier universes. The holy grail of grails would be to find experimental evidence of the 'multiverse', the supposed multiplicity of parallel universes predicted, or rather unavoidably encountered, by string theory. This might then suggest that physics has not, as some

suspect, been wasting its time for thirty years quantum tunnelling down a blind alley.

Easily the most expensive projects undertaken by the European Space Agency, these telescopes were bundled together on one rocket (which has been known to explode) for economy's sake. So were the scientists nervous at take-off? You betcha. It wasn't

just the prospect of a £1.7 bn firework display, it was the gambling of a huge time investment by hundreds of people. "I woke up at 4.15am this morning, I was so nervous", said one Cardiff astrophysicist. "Some people have spent 10 years and more on this I felt sick to the stomach."

And it wasn't just past effort that was riding on the launch. "If this were to have blown up... a lot of people could have lost their jobs and grants and funds coming for it would have gone." (*'Jitters and joy at rocket launch'*, BBC Online, 14 May). As a bonus, Cardiff University looks forward to seeing a big boost in undergraduate admissions as a result of their involvement in the ESA project. In capitalism, even in pure science, there's always an angle.



Patent Stupidity

IMAGINE GETTING cancer and being told that you can't have a cancer test because one of the genes involved in the cancer belongs to a private company. This is what happened to Genae Girard of Austin, Texas, in 2006, when she ran up against a patent owned by the company Myriad Genetics. Now, with the backing of other cancer patients and professional groups of pathologists, she is suing Myriad and the US Patent Office (*'Cancer Patients Challenge the Patenting of a Gene'*, New York Times, 12 May). At stake is the question of whether it is legitimate for companies to own natural processes. Yes, say companies like Myriad, who wish to charge patients like Girard \$3,000 and who refuse to work with their health insurers. Yes, says the Patent Office, who argue that patent restrictions encourage technological development. No, say a host of researchers, who argue the precise opposite, that patents limit research and result in mediocrity and stagnation. Other companies say they can do the same work as Myriad, faster and cheaper, but are legally prevented from doing so. Though one patent-owning company drew praise by being generous with free licensing, this is not likely to be the norm, and future research involving the crossing of multiple patent walls will most probably founder. Many scientists are simply outraged at this imposition of market values on the quest for knowledge. For them, the future of science is in the balance. "You can't patent my DNA, any more than you can patent my right arm, or patent my blood," says Jan Nowak, of the Association for Molecular Pathology. But in capitalist law, you can

own anything, no matter how much it flies in the face of common sense and common interest.

We can only hope that the next bit of good news is that someone has patented the swine flu virus. That way, none of us will be allowed to catch it.

Lawfare and Disorder

WHILE LITIGATORS across the Pond battle over intellectual property rights, litigation over in the UK seems bent on abolishing intelligence. The well-known enthusiasm among member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to pursue libel suits against western newspapers and individuals seems now to have spilled over into junk science. Using libel law to prevent and punish unwelcome criticism is known as 'lawfare' and even 'libel terrorism', and is a standard tactic for the OIC, but now snake-oil merchants everywhere will be ecstatic that the British Chiropractic Association has won its libel case against the science writer Simon Singh, who described certain of its practices as 'bogus' (*New Scientist*, 16 May). This victory may owe a great deal to the fact that, in English libel law, the burden of proof is upon the defendant, not the prosecution, a peculiarity which has spawned a UK-centred 'libel tourism' industry. Now the homeopaths and crystal-therapists will be catching on. You don't need to prove that your 'alternative' homespun voodoo works, you can just rely on the defence being unable to prove that it doesn't. Were we to claim in this paper that fairies don't exist, we would nonetheless have a hard time proving it.

Is capitalism dead?

Dear Editors,

I am writing to you because I do not understand why, now that Capitalism has collapsed (it is only giving symptoms of life by virtue of the heart-lung machine of the media), Britain does not hear more from you.

Capitalism is dead. It has been slowly dying for the past 100 years. All one has to do to prove this is to compare the value of the pound sterling 100 years ago with its present value. We have watched capitalism stagger from one financial calamity to another. And now we have reached its death. It is no longer a matter of whether one is a Socialist or not. It is now about survival. There is nothing so irresistible as an idea whose time has come. Britain is a society or it is nothing. Why are we not all working (and being paid commensurately) for the improvement of our society. Where is the logic in allowing a stockbroker to earn five times as much as a schoolmaster? Who is more valuable to our Society? I realise this might not 'sell' to the public, but surely you should be point out in no uncertain terms:

(1) A bank collapses and is nationalised, we the people being left to pick up the tab. Why, when we nationalise a losing enterprise does not our government also nationalise the profit-making companies to counterbalance this loss?

(2) Certain aspects of our society are far too important to be left in the hands of a bunch of greedy self-seeking oligarchs? Surely the collapse of our banks has proved this? No-one would suggest we privatise our police or our armed forces or our fire and ambulance services. So, is it not logical that our transport, (land, sea and air), our water, electricity and gas services are together with our steel and nuclear industries equally vital and should also be in public ownership?

Why is this case not being put before the public who are increasingly desperate for an answer to our hopeless capitalist system?

Simple, straight messages showing how Socialism is the answer to our present economic troubles rather than fighting valid but pointless 'class wars' would make a great impact right now. 100,000 emails showing how and why Socialism must come because it is the only answer to this death of Capitalism, should be being sent out every week. I get at least one email a week from the BNP. If they can do it why cannot you? Drop being

anti-American and anti-Israel. That is a waste of time and space. Start concentrating on being pro-Britain. The people need Socialism only they don't know it. Tell them.

DAVID LEE (by email)

Reply:

We would like to be as confident as you that capitalism is dying but we can't be. We know from past crises – and, in the history of capitalism, there have been at least two, in the 1880s and the 1930s, as big as this one – that capitalism can recover from them. Capitalism won't die. It has to be done to death, by the intentional, political action of the excluded majority of wage and salary workers. We can of course agree that it is high time they did this, and we are doing all we can (pamphlets, leaflets, meetings, the internet and, yes, emails) to get them to do this and to establish in its place a society of common ownership, democratic control, production solely for use, and free access to what people need, socialism in short.

We must point out that, in our view, socialism can only be established on a world scale. This is because – as is surely obvious from the present crisis – capitalism, the system it will replace, is a world system. It would just not be possible to establish socialism only in one country.

It might be possible to nationalise utilities, transport and other industries just in Britain. But this wouldn't deprive the "greedy self-seeking oligarchs" of their property and privileges since when an industry is nationalised the shareholders are paid "compensation" which they can then reinvest in some other business. In any event, even though nationalisation is sometimes called "public ownership", it is not really ownership by "the public", i.e. the community, i.e. all of us, but only ownership by the state, i.e. by the minority whose interests it serves. Nationalisation, as the experience of the nationalised industries between 1945 and the 1980s shows, is really state capitalism with the employees still needing trade unions to try to get better pay and working conditions from their employer – Editors.

Monstrous system

Dear Editors

We must reject the notion that a money-based, inordinately complex market system, propped up by bail-outs, is the only feasible system of

society. It leads to serious poverty for the masses against riches for a minority, widespread stress, one person's gain at the expense of another, trade disputes, wars, pollution, homelessness. It stifles medical research and education and it makes charities necessary. This monstrous system has already cost millions of lives in wars and famines. Instead, we should campaign worldwide for a system of common ownership of the resources that we need for a happier life.

VINCENT LITTLEMORE, Banstead

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Mystery of the Pig / Bird / Human Flu Virus

“SWINE FLU” is really a misleading term for the current pandemic, inasmuch as no single species serves as host of preference for the new virus. It does not need to mutate as it jumps from pig to human and back again. This is a fully trans-species disease.

According to the findings of Canada’s National Microbiology Lab, the genome of the new virus is a strange composite of eight segments from four old viruses, associated with two distinct varieties of swine flu (North American and Eurasian), a North American avian flu and a human flu (the H3N2 strain last seen in 1993). *New Scientist* calls it “an unusually mongrelised mix of genetic sequences.”

Possible sources of the virus

It is widely assumed that the virus evolved in a pig. Suspicion has come to rest on a huge fly-infested lake of pig shit on the site of a pig factory – calling these places “farms” creates quite the wrong impression – in the central Mexican province of Veracruz. The pig factory (one of 16 in the province) is owned by Granjas Carroll, which is itself half-owned by the US pork and beef conglomerate, Smithfield Farms. The idea that this particular factory is the source of the outbreak is based on the fact that a young boy living nearby is the earliest known case of infection with the virus.

This explanation is certainly plausible. Pigs are susceptible to most if not all of the main virus families, so different kinds of virus can easily accumulate inside the cells of their tissues and exchange genetic material. Pigs are therefore ideal incubators for the evolution and spread of viruses, especially when their immune systems are weakened by being crammed together in the filthy pens provided by profit-seeking agribusiness. Over the years, many experts have predicted that the outcome would be pandemics of new diseases.

Nevertheless, the evidence for this version seems far from conclusive. There may well be earlier cases elsewhere that have not been traced. Smithfield systematically obstructs all investigation into its operations, but that proves nothing: no doubt there are many things that they want to hide.

So other possibilities cannot be ruled out. It is unwarranted to assume that the virus must have originated in Mexico because conditions there are more unhygienic than in the US. The pig factories in Veracruz and those in North Carolina are owned by the same firms and run in the same way.

According to *Online Journal*, a “top UN scientist” believes that the virus was released, accidentally or deliberately, from a biological weapons lab, inasmuch as certain features of its highly unusual structure are suggestive of genetic engineering. A possible source is the US Army Medical Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, Maryland. It was from here, for instance, that someone spread anthrax germs in 2001.

Prospects

When the pandemic first hit the headlines, scientists

did not yet even understand the nature of the new virus and it was impossible to assess the severity of the danger. That did not deter some politicians and officials from reassuring the public and others from voicing the most alarming predictions.

To a large extent, the mixed responses can be explained in terms of divergent commercial and other interests. The reassurance is designed to avert panic and unrest, safeguard sales and exports of US and Mexican pork, protect the tourist industry and maintain business confidence. The alarmism serves the interests, above all, of the big pharmaceutical companies that produce anti-flu drugs and vaccines.

Mass vaccination is not always an effective measure against pathogens susceptible to rapid mutation. Moreover, the vaccine itself may be contaminated

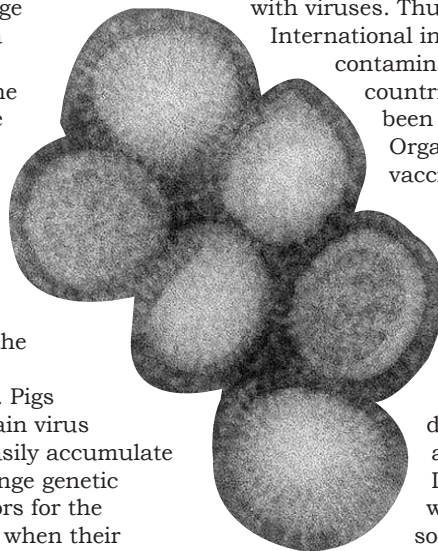
with viruses. Thus, last December a lab of Baxter

International in Austria distributed vaccines

contaminated with live avian flu virus to 18

countries. The same company has now been commissioned by the World Health Organization to develop an experimental vaccine for the new flu.

Whatever the outcome of the current pandemic, it is safe to say that it will not be the last. On the one hand, meat factories and biological weapons labs continue to generate new pathogens. On the other hand, these pathogens are increasingly drug-resistant due to the indiscriminate use of antibiotics and other malpractices. It is only a matter of time before we find ourselves helpless in face of some new and much more fatal trans-species virus or bacterium.



the flu virus

Preventing pandemics in socialism

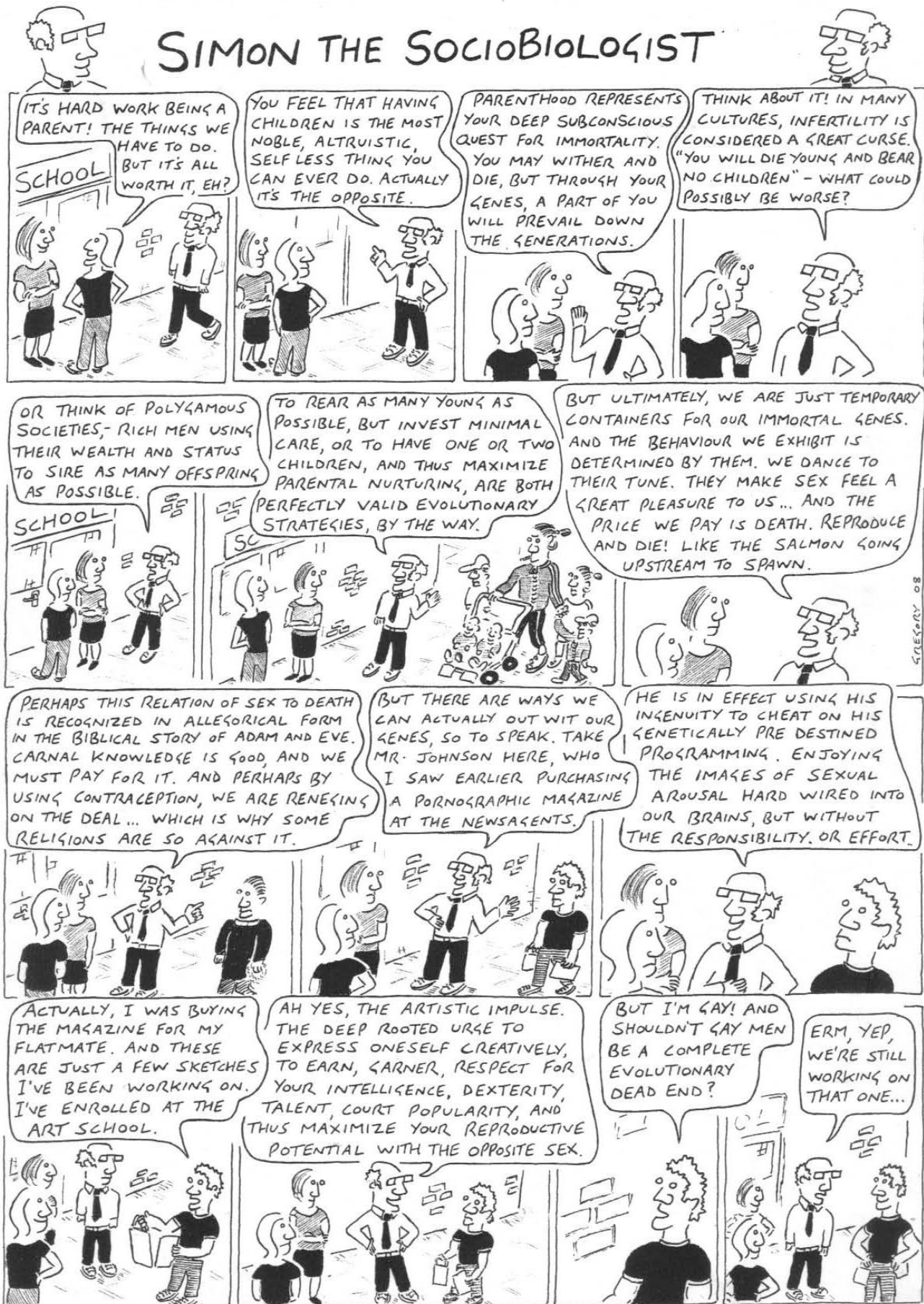
Eliminating the profit motive will remove the major obstacle to the prevention of trans-species pandemics. Those responsible for food production will be able to give proper weight to environmental and public health considerations.

However, this may not suffice if socialist society were to commit itself to providing a meat-rich diet for most of the population. (Some people, of course, will not want such a diet.) Disease control may well require the abandonment of animal factories and a return to a more traditional type of farming. This is likely to reduce the supply of meat, although it will also enhance its taste and nutritional value.

Besides change in patterns of production and consumption, a shift away from reliance on air travel would help slow down the spread of new diseases and allow more time for research and countermeasures. (It would also reduce greenhouse gas emissions.) Work schedules might be coordinated in such a way as to give people the time they need to use and enjoy slower means of travel, interspersed as desired with participation in the life of local communities, including farming.

STEFAN

SIMON THE SOCIOBIOLOGIST



Pieces together

A GRATEFUL NATION?

"It is only when darkness falls on the streets of London that the plight of many veterans of the Armed Forces becomes fully apparent. More than 1,000 of them are homeless. Until a couple of months ago Ray (not his real name) was one of them living on the streets. He had enlisted in the Royal Green Jackets (Light Division) in 1993 and saw service in Northern Ireland. He left the Army in November 2001 but found civvy street a harsh place.... "You think after serving your time in the Army society will accept you," he says, "but they don't and no one helps." (*Times*, 25 April)

AMERICAN POVERTY

"An estimated 3.5 million children younger than 5 are at risk of hunger in the United States, according to government numbers provided by an anti-hunger group. That's more than 17 percent of children who could suffer cognitive and developmental damage if they are not properly fed. The not-for-profit advocacy group Feeding America based its findings on 2005-2007 data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Agriculture Department. The study, released Thursday, is the first to look at these numbers for children under the age of 5, according to the group. Feeding America runs food banks and feeding centers around the country. The study also shows that in 11 states, more than 20 percent of children under 5 are at risk of going hungry. Louisiana has the highest rate, with just under a quarter of children at risk, followed by North Carolina, Ohio, Kentucky, Texas, New Mexico, Kansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Idaho and Arkansas." (*Yahoo News*, 7 May)

HARD TIMES?

"Virgin boss Sir Richard Branson is reported to have lost 56% of his wealth, shedding £1.5bn and is now worth £1.2bn. Meanwhile, Formula 1 motor racing chief Bernie Ecclestone lost £934m, leaving him at £1.46bn, the list reported. The richest British-born billionaire is the land and property owning Duke of Westminster, who has seen his wealth shrink to £6.5bn from £7bn. In fourth spot are Ernesto and Kirsty Bertarelli: the former Miss UK winner and her husband have a £5.6bn fortune based on pharmaceuticals. Their fortune has shrunk by a relatively modest 12% over the year. But it is not all gloom - the former boss of supermarket chain Morrisons, Sir Ken Morrison, has seen his fortune increase by 11%, making him worth £1.6bn. The wealth of Peter and Denise Coates, owners of Stoke-based online sports betting website Bet365, has gone up by 33%, to £400m. And Harrods boss Mohammed al-Fayed has benefited from a cheap pound - his fortune stands at £650m, up 17% on last year." (*BBC Times*, 25 April)

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No jam tomorrow either

There's a story told about a barber who displayed a sign outside his shop that stated "Free haircuts tomorrow". When someone came in the next day asking for a free haircut, the barber pointed to the sign indicating that the free haircuts were for tomorrow not today.

In the past politicians in power worked the same con. Work harder, pull together, make sacrifices today, they used to say, and in a few years you'll reap the rewards. Of course tomorrow never came. They are no longer saying this now. At least the Tory Leader, David Cameron, isn't. Addressing a conference of his party, he spoke of "the Age of Austerity" that we are entering (*Times*, 27 April) and the effects this was going to have on our standard of living.

He is of course in a difficult position. This time next year he expects to be Prime Minister, but one presiding over an economy that will still be in a depression and which will require severe cutbacks in government spending. He knows it just wouldn't be credible if he promised jam tomorrow.

Actually, despite Gordon Brown's claim to be spending the way out of the crisis – actually, trying to print his way out of it – there's already austerity today. As the *Guardian* reported on 27 April:

"More than half of British firms plan to freeze pay this year while one in eight are planning to cut workers' pay, the British Chambers of Commerce says today. The BCC says its survey of 400 companies across the country shows that 58% of businesses are planning wage freezes this year while 12% are planning actually to cut pay in response to big falls in inflation and falling profits. The survey hints at the danger of deflation in Britain, with prices falling on the retail prices index measure, which could tip into a downward spiral if firms cut their pay. Official data last week showed pay growth had plummeted to just above zero – the lowest on record." (www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/apr/27/uk-jobs-cuts-pay-freezes)

Meanwhile, unemployment is continuing to rise: "The UK unemployment total is now 2,215,000 – the worst figure since 1996. The Office for National Statistics also showed a fall in earnings by 0.4 per cent in the year to March, the first time this has ever gone negative" (*Morning Star*, 13 May. See also <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=10>).

The two are of course connected. Wages are a price, the price of the working skills that workers sell to employers, which like all prices is subject to the law of supply and demand. With growing unemployment and a stagnating economy demand falls while supply increases, so exerting a powerful downward pressure on wages.

If the economic commentators were honest, they would hail this fall in wages as one of the "green shoots of recovery" they are desperately looking for, since one of the conditions for recovery is that wages should fall. That's the way capitalism works and always has worked.

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Not So Honourable Members

The recent expenses scandal has confirmed that many politicians are just self-serving careerists but, even if they were all saints, it wouldn't make any difference to the way capitalism works.

Amid the uproar over the MPs' expense claims, we should not lose sight of an important fact. Unlike applying to be reimbursed for the cost of dog food or a swimming pool, much of what our representatives in Parliament do is a waste of time. Claiming to make us all more secure by controlling the economy they endlessly debate their Budgets, financial statements and regulations but when there bursts onto the scene something like a credit crunch – a recession, a slump – they are revealed as powerless to do more than mouth baseless analyses or predictions while capitalism grinds on its barbarous way.

It is much the same about crime as one government after another, on a promise to reduce the problem almost to elimination, churns out a legislative flood providing for more stringent penalties and to re-define some behaviour from legal to criminal. For example the Fraud Act of 2006 was designed to make it easier for the prosecution to get convictions for offences of fraud and increased the maximum sentence from seven to ten years. There is a certain irony about this reform,

as it as it would have an effect on those Honourable Members who passed it into law but may find themselves in court for so profitably exploiting the loopholes in Parliament's system of allowances to claim for a non-existent mortgage or for making false declarations to the Customs and Revenue. Meanwhile crime continues to be a disfiguring problem, of an intensity which shows no significant evidence of being influenced by Parliament's professed attempts to control it; its origins lie outside the scope of such delusions.

System

But of course the MPs have to believe that what they do is vitally important; otherwise their self-esteem would suffer such serious damage as to make it very difficult for them to discuss their own wages, extra allowances and working conditions – or rather their improvement. When, during the recent storm of protests over their finances they were being

questioned by nosey journalists, a common response was to blame the whole problem onto something they called "the system" which everyone knows to be sadly defective and in need of immediate re-ordering. This breathtakingly implausible argument ignored the fact that "the system" was itself the creation of MPs who, while often denouncing workers as irresponsible wreckers when they try to improve, or even defend, their living standards are allowed to better their own wages and the like. It also took no account that the discredited claims for the extra allowances breached the requirement – which was intended to give the impression of adequate safeguards – to be for "additional costs wholly, exclusively and necessarily" incurred in their work – which did not mean cleaning a moat or installing a home cinema.

Mullin

In July 2001 Chris Mullin, the Labour MP for Sunderland, made himself unpopular by opposing a Commons motion to increase MP's wages by £4000, tabling an amendment to align rises with those for nurses, teachers and the like. Mullin thought the opposition to his





Chris Mullin

amendment was meant to approve the original motion on the nod, avoiding any debate and implicating all the MPs. Unsurprisingly he lost his amendment, the MPs awarded themselves the rise and an increase in the accrual rate of their pension from 50ths to 40ths – which Mullin furiously described as “shameless”. It is not known whether he felt some grisly justification when, in the following year, the Tory MP for Windsor, Michael Trend, was suspended for two weeks after the *Mail On Sunday* revealed that he had claimed almost £90,000 in accommodation allowances although he lived in his constituency. Trend did not stand in the 2005 election and his successor in the seat, Adam Afriyie, is reported in the *Daily Telegraph* as not making any claim.

McNulty

Another example of what might be moderately called double standards is Tony McNulty, Labour MP for Harrow. McNulty is known as a bruiser, someone to be relied on in the TV studios to dismiss any critic of the New Labour method of running capitalism as mad or malicious or both, hardly worth any attention from a Minister in the Department of Work and Pensions, with responsibility to crack down on anyone caught making false claims for state benefit. He recently declared that such people are “benefit thieves” who will be ruthlessly hunted down by use of developed technology and “face imprisonment, fines and other penalties. We will also make sure they pay back the money they have stolen...and seek to ensure any proceeds from their crime are confiscated too”. However

McNulty has also been caught out – not through any technological device but by simple journalistic trawling through Parliamentary records – in behaviour which some of his constituents might regard as a kind of theft, claiming almost £60,000 allowance for a house in Harrow which he owns but which he should not claim on because it is where his parents live. His home, which he shares with his wife, is in Hammersmith. All of this was in spite of the rule that all claims for the Additional Costs Allowances must be “above reproach” and not encourage any speculation that the object is “...benefiting from public



Tony McNulty

funds”.

McNulty conceded that his claim may be “a bit odd” but justified it on the grounds that “everyone does it” – by which he presumably meant every MP, but not every benefit claimant. He was at first resistant to even paying back the money – although if he ever comes into court in the matter, as many people outside his constituency as well as inside it hope – to try to buy his way out of trouble in that way is unlikely to significantly affect the outcome. In any case he would surely be the last to suggest that he should be treated any more leniently than the benefit fraudsters he so zealously persecutes. That the scandal of parliamentary allowances has revealed so many MPs as devoted, persistent practitioners of the art of double standards should surprise nobody. For the reality is that the capitalist system which governments profess to be able to control is itself a massive, universal fraud on the majority of its people.

IVAN

Problems and Solutions

Socialism won't be a problem-free society but it will allow problems to be dealt with rationally.

Capitalism is a society beset by problems, from poverty, unemployment and homelessness to war, violence and insecurity. As the current recession shows, even those who consider themselves to be comfortably off and with a relatively ‘good’ job may still be thrown out of work with little notice. The housing market is in such a state that many people cannot sell their homes and estate agents are closing almost as quickly as pubs. The fact is that capitalism throws up problem after problem, and this is an in-built aspect of the system’s operation.

Now, socialism will not be a society without problems. There will doubtless still be personal disagreements and dislikes, and natural disasters to disrupt the straightforward functioning of everyday life. But we can say with some assurance that the problems of socialism will be very different from those of capitalism.

We may distinguish two situations. The first consists of problems of capitalism which will simply not arise in socialism; the second of problems that socialism will be far better equipped to address and to solve than capitalism is.

All the economic difficulties of capitalism will automatically be things of the past in a socialist society. The idea that there could be people who want to work but are forced to sit around idle, while at the same time there are others who badly need the goods or services that the first group could provide, would be totally alien. There would be no unemployed building workers alongside homeless people or inhabitants of slums. No unemployed agricultural workers alongside the starving. Anyone who wishes to contribute to production will be able to do so, without considerations of profit and the market being of any relevance. Poverty will vanish in a society based on free access and production for use, and people will not starve while

continued on page 14

Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Reformism

Marx wrote a book 150 years ago that shows why money exists today and how we can get along fine with out it tomorrow

A *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, first published in 1859, only consists of two chapters (apart from its famous Preface). Marx had intended it to be the first instalment in a massively ambitious project that was to include six separate “books” addressing, respectively, the topics of capital, landed property, wage labour, the state, international trade, and the world market. The first book on the topic of capital was to have included four “sections” dealing with: capital in general, competition, credit, and share capital.

In other words, the two chapters of *Contribution* (“The Commodity” and “Money, or Simple Circulation”) are just the first “instalment” of the first section of the first book – to have been followed promptly by a second instalment that would move on to introduce capital, its circuit, etc.

Things did not exact proceed according to the original plan, needless to say. Not only did Marx fail to complete the six books, he did not even publish the additional chapters on capital for the first section of Book one. This has led to scholarly debates over the degree to which the content of the three volumes of *Capital* – of which Marx only oversaw publication of the first volume – correspond to the six books he had first envisaged.

Even taken on its own, however, Marx's two-chapter book presents us with much of the knowledge we require in our effort to dispel the reformist illusions still so widespread today. The problem with reformism, as we can learn from *Contribution*, is not that it is overly pragmatic and insufficiently idealistic, but that it is thoroughly impractical and utopian, based as it is upon a surprising ignorance of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism as a society of commodity production.

Proudhon undone

Marx viewed *Contribution* as a work with an important “polemical”

aspect. Yet any reader expecting the stirring rhetoric or vivid imagery of the sort found in *The Communist Manifesto* is sure to be disappointed. Instead of “A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism,” the first line of *Contribution* is: “At first sight the wealth of bourgeois society appears as an immense heap of commodities; and the individual commodity as its essential determinate being.” It is a wonderfully succinct sentence that explains why Marx must begin with the analysis of the commodity, but not likely to appear on many t-shirts or bumper stickers.

The “exceedingly serious and scientific air” of *Contribution*, as he described the book to his friend Engels around the time of its publication, was not the result of some erudite pose Marx struck, but because his analysis of the commodity and money deals with some of the most abstract elements of capitalist society. Marx told his friend that he hoped the scholarly style would oblige reviewers of the book to refrain from the usual “tendentious vituperation” “take [his] views on capitalism rather seriously.” Unfortunately, as he would later complain to Ferdinand Lasalle, his views were neither attacked nor criticized in Germany, but “utterly ignored,” which he thought was “bound to have a serious effect on sales.”

Yet Marx's primary interest was not the reaction from the scholarly world, or even the badly needed book royalties, but the

influence that *Contribution* would have on the socialist movement in Europe. He hoped the ideas in the book would help to wipe out the reformist fantasies that still clung to the movement; for the mid-nineteenth century, much like today, was an age when all sorts of self-styled “revolutionaries” were peddling commodity-production sludge in shiny new buckets labelled “Socialism.”

Marx was



particularly eager to expose the pseudo-socialist ideas of Jean Pierre Proudhon, then fashionable in France. Marx described “Proudhonist socialism,” in a February 1859 letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, as the wish to “retain private production while organizing the exchange of private products, to have commodities but not money,” insisting that “communism must above all rid itself of this ‘false brother.’” Marx even told Engels, in July of that year, that if he were to review *Contribution* the first point to emphasize would be that the book “extirpates Proudhonism root and branch.”

The way Marx uproots Proudhonism in *Contribution*, however, is not through a narrow polemic aimed at that ideological tendency alone, but rather by means of a scientific analysis of the commodity and money, which reveals their inseparability and how both forms characterize capitalism as one particular historical mode of production. So his analysis serves us equally well today in our own efforts to expose the fallacy of reformism in whatever shapes it may take.

The uncommon commodity

The term “commodity” is nearly synonymous with “product” these days, perhaps because we are so accustomed to the capitalist market economy. Yet Marx uses the term commodity in *Contribution* to refer specifically to products of labour that are produced for exchange, rather than to directly satisfy the material needs of the producers. As such, the commodity has both a use-value, as a thing that satisfies some human want, as well as an exchange-value, as something that brings to its owner money or another commodity of equal worth.

Use-value pertains to the properties of any product of labour as a physical thing. So use-value is not the aspect which specifically characterizes the commodity. From the taste of wheat,” Marx writes, “it is not possible to tell who produced it, a Russian serf, a French peasant or an English capitalist.” In any society, there is a need to produce useful things in order to satisfy human needs and sustain the society as a whole, but only under capitalism does the vast bulk of this material wealth take the form of commodities, as Marx points out in the first line of *Contribution* quoted earlier.

In short, use-value presents no great mystery, and is not even an actual economic form, so Marx

sets it aside to concentrate on the aspect of the commodity that *does* characterize the commodity as such: exchange-value. The key question initially is: What determines the exchange-value of a commodity?

This is a question that had been posed already by Adam Smith – and later by David Ricardo – and Marx agrees with their fundamental answer, known as the “labour theory of value,” which states that



Proudhon

the level at which a commodity will be exchanged depends upon the amount of labour expended for its production.

This theory is vital to an understanding of how capitalism functions as a commodity-production society. It shows that something – although *not* the conscious decisions of human beings – guides commodity exchange. Adam Smith famously used the expression “invisible hand” to depict this hidden force, but it seems more appropriate to speak of the *invisible hands* of the workers who labour to produce each commodity.

In *Contribution*, Marx develops the labour theory of value, arriving at a far clearer understanding of the labour “objectified” within the commodity to constitute its value, which he defines using such expressions as “uniform homogenous simple labour” or “abstract general labour”; and he also emphasizes that this labour is expended “under the generally prevailing conditions of production” in a given society. In short, we can say that the abstract time-time

socially necessary to produce a given commodity constitutes its value and fundamentally determines the level at which the commodity is exchanged.

The issue for Marx, however, is not merely how commodity exchange is carried out. He also ponders why labour under capitalism must take this materialized or objectified form (as the “substance” of value). And Marx begins to answer this question by introducing examples of production relations where labour does *not* take that form and products of labour do not assume the commodity form.

Marx notes, for instance, the example of medieval society, where “services and dues in kind” were performed directly to satisfy particular needs (albeit those of the feudal landlords), so that we are dealing with the “distinct labour of the individual in its original [concrete] form.” Another example he gives, which corresponds in some important respects to socialism, is the “communal labour in its spontaneously evolved form as we find it among all civilized nations at the dawn of their history.” In this case, the labour of each individual in the society is expended directly as one part of the overall labour, rather than the individuals each producing their own private products that are then exchanged as commodities.

Under commodity production, in contrast, the starting point is the labour “privately” expended by the various individuals who produce commodities for the market. Instead of the social relations between these individuals being clear from the outset, as in those two examples Marx raises, the producers are carrying out production in accordance with their own private aims and will. It is only when their commodities are exchanged that the producers first enter a social relation with one another.

This is why, under such social production, relations between human beings within production *necessarily* present themselves as relations between things (money and commodities). “Only the conventions of everyday life,” Marx writes in *Contribution*, “make it appear commonplace and ordinary that social relations of production should assume the shape of things, so that the relations into which people enter in the course of their work appear as relations of things to one and another and of things to people.”

People are so used to the relations of commodity production

that they find it difficult to imagine social relations of production that are not mediated by the exchange of commodities and money, which is one reason that reformist ideas manage to seem so pragmatic.

Demystifying money

Marx's analysis in chapter one of *Contribution* shows us that it is only under specific social relations of production, where the starting point of production is privately expended labour, that products of labour will take the commodity form and that the labour expended will take the form of value. In other words, these are socially specific economic forms – not the reflection of some eternal state of human affairs.

And the same is true of the money form. Marx points out that money in fact “represents a social relation of production” and that the “all of the illusions of the Monetary System arise from the failure” to perceive this fact. Money only possesses its strange, magical power within certain social production relations.

Marx reveals the source of that power in *Contribution* by reducing the money form to the simplest form of value, where one commodity expresses its own value using the use-value of a different commodity. In that simplest form, “the use-value of one commodity is brought into relation with the use-values of other commodities” so that the exchange-value of the commodity “manifests itself in the use-values of other commodities.” This is no different than the value of a commodity being expressed in the use-value of the commodity gold. Instead of gold *intrinsically* having a power as money, Marx shows that the power stems from a specific relation in which gold (or some other commodity) becomes the physical embodiment of value, so as to give tangible form to the intangible element of value.

Marx further demystifies money by explaining how it is that a particular commodity is excluded from other commodities to become money. He explains this emergence of a single commodity – as the “universal equivalent” (money) – as resulting from a contradiction confronting commodities in the exchange process, where “only by being realized as exchange-values can they be realized as use-values” and vice-versa. The way out of this “vicious circle” is the exclusion of one particular commodity as the universal equivalent, so that a

commodity owner can first exchange a commodity for that special commodity, which can be used to purchase whatever commodity is desired.

But it is not as if the commodity producers gather and debate which commodity should be chosen as that universal equivalent. “Money is not the result of deliberation or of agreement,” Marx argues, “but has come into being spontaneously in the course of exchange.” In any area of commodity exchange, historically speaking, there were always some commodities more frequently exchanged than others, such as fur, hides, rice, or cattle, to mention a few examples. By being exchanged for so many other different commodities, such “special” commodities would already bring those other commodities into a relation with each other, where their values could be expressed in the special commodity and they could also compare their values relative to each other via that commodity.

All sorts of commodities have played that role as “universal equivalent,” but ideally, Marx says, the function would require a commodity with the physical qualities of “unlimited divisibility, homogeneity of its parts and uniform quality of all [its] units.” These happen to be qualities that characterize precious metals, which accounts for why gold and silver eventually come to exclusively play the role of the money-commodity. “Although gold and silver are not by nature money, money is by nature gold and silver,” is the witty way Marx explained this point in *Capital*.

It would require many more paragraphs to adequately explain these aspects of Marx's essential theory of money presented in *Contribution* – not to mention his explanation of the functions in money in chapter two – but the main point here is just to convey some idea of how well he grasps the profoundly social and historical nature of money and its inseparable connection to commodity production.

Reformists have trouble understanding that commodities and money only exist under specific relations of production, and this also accounts for their inability to imagine fundamentally different social relations where there is no need or room for those economic forms to exist.

M. SCHAUERTE

from page 11

food is exported. So all the problems of destitution, insecurity and worry will be gone, since these are created by capitalism's rationing of goods and its exploitation of the working class.

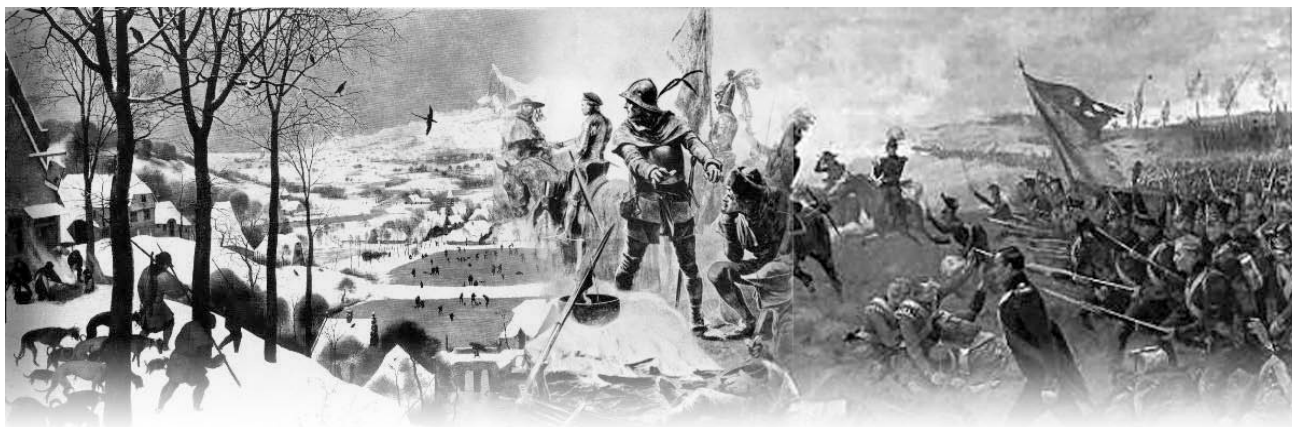
Concepts like booms and slumps and recession and unemployment will have been confined to the history books.

Equally, war will no longer exist. With no contending countries and no ruling classes, there will be no need for vast armies making use of the latest weapons technology. Issues such as ensuring the availability of raw materials like oil will not arise, since they will be the common property of all the Earth's people. Resources, both natural and human, will no longer be wasted on killing and inventing new ways of killing other humans.

At the same time, there will be other problems which will exist in socialism, and for which the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth will not automatically provide a solution. Environmental issues would be a prominent example of this. Under capitalism, the profit motive and the short-term nature of planning combine to cause pollution and destruction of the environment. Socialism would be unable to simply stop interfering with the world we live in, since production of any kind assumes some sort of interaction with our environment. Nor can we say now how much mess capitalism will leave behind for socialism to grapple with. To what degree, for instance, will global warming have gone beyond the point of no return? How much oil will still be available, and how will energy be produced?

There are no easy answers to such ecological questions, and we cannot just dismiss them by saying that socialism will evince a concern for the environment that capitalism never can. Rather we can point out that satisfying human need and caring for the environment will be at the forefront of socialism's priorities. If they come into conflict, decisions will have to be taken about whether to emphasise one or the other in a particular case. The answers cannot be given yet, since we do not even know just what the questions will be. But from anything other than a capitalist perspective, caring for the world is part of satisfying human need, since we are part of the planet and must always live within it.

PAUL BENNETT



Understanding history

This year is the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin *The Origin of Species* but also of the publication of Marx's first economic writings after his more detailed study of the workings of capitalism, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

The Preface to this work contains a summary of Marx and Engels' materialist conception of history. Marx comments that during the course of his studies he reached the conclusion that the explanation of social development was not to be found merely in the realm of ideas but rather in the material conditions of life, and that a proper understanding of capitalism is to be found in economics. Marx then gives a condensed account of his key concepts and their likely relationships which provided the guiding thread for his historical research:

"The general result at which I arrived and which, once won, served as a guiding thread for my studies, can be briefly formulated as follows: in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundations the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so we

cannot judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production. No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individual; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close."

Discussions of this passage usually omit the first sentence above where Marx says the following "general result" served as a "guiding thread" for his research. This makes it clear that his theory of history is not a substitute for actual research. The materialist conception of history is a method of investigation, not a philosophy of history. Marx and Engels emphasised this point in their first explanation of their materialist (in the practical sense of the word, not in its acquisitive sense) outlook:

"Viewed apart from real history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, our difficulties begin only when we set about the observation and the arrangement – the real depiction – of our historical material, whether of a past epoch or of the present" (*The German Ideology*, 1846).

As Engels wrote: "the materialist method is converted into its direct opposite if instead of being used as a guiding thread in historical research it is made to serve as a ready-cut pattern on which to tailor historical facts" (Letter to



Paul Ernst, 5 June 1890). And Marx emphatically rejected “general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical”. He poured scorn on a critic who:

“... insists on transforming my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in western Europe into an historico-philosophical theory of the general path prescribed by fate to all nations whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves in order that they may ultimately arrive at the economic system which ensures, together with the greatest expansion of the productive power of social labour, the most complete development of man. But I beg his pardon. He is doing me too much honour and at the same time slandering me too much”

(Letter to the editor of *Otechestvennive Zapiski*, November 1877).

Despite the numerous warnings, many commentators have concluded that Marx’s theory of history, as set out in the 1859 Preface, is a form of productive forces (or technological) determinism. For instance, in his influential book GA Cohen claims that “high technology was not only necessary but also sufficient for socialism” (*Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence*, 1978). But socialism is not inevitable; the fatalism of determinism is fatal for the socialist movement which requires a politically active class conscious working class to achieve our self-emancipation as a class.

The 1859 Preface assumes the development of human productive forces throughout history, but this is not automatic or inevitable. In Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) social and political development did not occur exactly as outlined in the 1859 Preface, but that was not the point. Marx’s hypothesis showed the key concepts and where to look in researching the past and present. That study reaffirmed the importance of understanding the specific contexts of material circumstances and humans as agents of historical change:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.”

If this looks like stating the obvious (apart from the sexist assumption), to some extent it is because of Marx’s influence on public thinking about history. In his day prominence in historical writing was given to the role of ideas – for example, nationalism, freedom, religion – in explaining social development. This is still not unknown today and there are many who, explicitly or implicitly, reject the materialist theory of history for its revolutionary conclusions.

The 1859 Preface identifies certain well-documented “modes of production” found in history, whose constituents are “forces of production” (productive technology) and “relations of production” (economic classes). Present-day capitalist production relations involve minority class ownership of the means of life, which means the majority must sell their labour power for a wage, while production is geared to profit for the few. In feudalism aristocrats owned most of the land and peasants were tied down to that land by a host of restrictions, including the requirement that they did unpaid labour for their liege lords. There was slavery – where the bodies of the producers were the property of slave owners and were bought and sold like land or goods. The Asiatic mode of production (sometimes called “oriental despotism”) was a system where millions of peasants were engaged under military pressure to raise water for the irrigation of crops. There were various types of primitive society – the key one being the primitive communistic tribal form, where localised common ownership was practised.

The actual correspondence between forces of production and relations of production takes place through the mediation of the class struggle and the balance of class forces – what Marx called “the respective power of the combatants” (*Value, Price and Profit*, 1865). For example, China’s rise as a capitalist super-power has taken place mainly through the Chinese state’s ruthless use of cheap and plentiful labour power, rather than advances in its productive technology. For the workers of the world the materialist conception of history is a vital tool in our emancipation, for taking informed political action to bring class-divided society to an end.

LEW

No growth area

On Wednesday 22 April, Alistair Darling, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, took his snout out of the trough for a while to deliver the budget speech. He ended it with what he must have thought was a brilliant soundbite:

"You can grow your way out of a recession. You cannot cut your way out".

Well, er, yes. A recession is a period when there is no growth, when in fact there is a fall in production, what the spin-doctors called "negative growth". So, obviously, a recession comes to an end when growth resumes. The big question is: can a government do anything to make this happen?

But what is "growth" anyway? For government statisticians it is an increase in the Gross Domestic Product. GDP is made up of what capitalist firms invest + what consumers spend + what the government spends. For Marxists, the key part of this is capital accumulation, the part of profits that capitalist firms re-invest in production, the motor of the capitalist economy and which determines the level of consumer spending.

While governments can influence GDP – if only by increasing their own expenditure – they cannot do anything to increase capital accumulation. That depends on the amount of profits that capitalist firms expect to make, which in turn depends on market conditions, which government's can't control.

An increase in GDP brought about by an increase in government spending – which is the government's plan to get out of what Darling delicately calls "the recession" – can only come in long run out of profits, the source of funds for capital accumulation. In the short run it's only a statistical illusion. It doesn't increase capital accumulation and so doesn't result in growth in actual production..

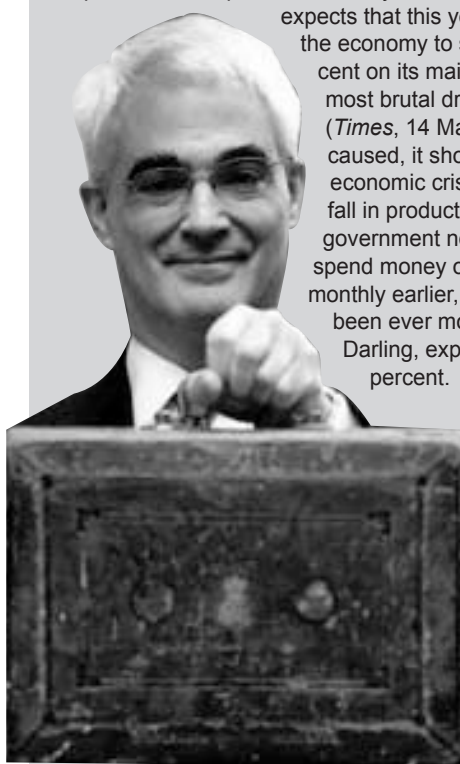
Even here, though, Darling is not expecting GDP to go up until some time towards the end of next year. In the meantime, he estimated, GDP would have fallen by 3.5 percent. Not everybody agrees on this figure. In its latest quarterly *Inflation Report* published in May, the Bank of England "now

expects that this year's slump will lead the economy to shrink by up to 4.5 per cent on its main view, marking the most brutal drop in GDP since 1946" (*Times*, 14 May). The 1946 drop was caused, it should be noted, not by an economic crisis, not by any actual fall in production, but simply by the government no longer having to spend money on fighting a war. Three months earlier, however, the Bank had been ever more optimistic than Darling, expecting a fall of only 3 percent.

Basically, they don't know. As Mervyn King, the Bank's Governor, put it:

"We may well get a recovery that proves to be sustained, then again, we may not" (*Times*, 14 May).

True. And how very profound.



The price of "freedom"



Sean Hodgson (above) sits in his room in the hostel where they are doing their best to help him recover from the past twenty seven years. Before he was sentenced for a murder which, it was eventually conceded, he did not commit, he stood a robust six feet tall and weighed in at 13 stone. Since then the years of "treatment" for a turmoil of conditions – angina, prostate cancer, schizophrenia as well as the global, persistent, untreatable stress of being locked up although innocent – have rendered him into this fragile, bewildered man. An unhappy man whose experiences tell a lot about this social system, how it responds to its characteristic tensions and does not easily contemplate the possibility that it has got anything so barbarously wrong.

"Freedom? It's lonely" headlined a recent article about him. He misses the congestion on the prison wings and he is disorientated by the abrupt absence of the repressive demands – so essential to an orderly prison – of going to bed, or wherever, when he is told and for all his actions to be conditioned with the same hostility. If he now wanted, he could spend all night on the streets. Except that all he can manage emotionally is a trip to the nearby 24 hour shop, or an unplanned visit to his solicitor. His symptoms are typical – like the man who on release went to live with his girl friend but spent most of his time in the one bedroom which for its size and shape most closely resembled a prison cell.

If Sean Hodgson ever recovers in the sense of conforming to the life style commonly required of employment (which is doubtful – he says that his previous behaviour was such that "If I hadn't gone to prison I'd have been dead now, from the drugs") he will find that the disciplines he conforms to voluntarily are as demanding and arduous as many he contended with behind the prison walls. And, as the evidence of the emotional deprivations of everyday working life attests, being a "free" employee does not imply any access to a gregariously fulfilling lifestyle. There are tragically many people who live and work in the busiest of cities and are desperately lonely.

One type of company now available to Sean Hodgson which he is not grateful for was the attention of the tabloid press. His conviction, for

raping and murdering a woman, was very media-attractive. With DNA sampling he should have been released eleven years earlier but the records which could have been used in this were mislaid and it took a lot of work by his solicitor to unearth them. Which is probably why a reporter has been following Sean Hodgson around, talking to other people about him, trying to get a story – or make one up if need be. This, Sean said, made him feel “rotten”. But he will have to learn, in his new “freedom”, that the media is as motivated to sell its products profitably as is any other business, no matter what the cost of human suffering.

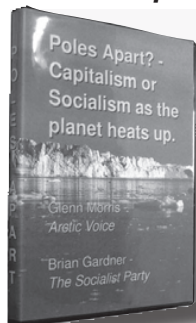
Sean Hodgson's time in prison was a comparatively placid interlude in a tumultuous life of addiction, crime and vagrancy. One who has been involved in many discharged prisoners with similar problems gives a gloomy prognosis: “...they all follow a pattern. I haven't known any who haven't either been suicidal or wanted to go into jail after a year”. A great deal of capitalism's resources have been expended, over a very long time, to moderating such problems through what is called the criminal justice system. Sean Hodgson is only the latest example of the obdurate failure within that assumption.

IVAN

Our thanks for some of the material in this article to Aida Edemariam and her report in The Guardian on 29 April

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Prejudice

A true tale from a kebab shop

I WAS serving a regular customer; a person who is showing me a lot of respect. The boss of the kebab shop doesn't like it when I talk to the customers because he thinks I am his slave and that I should behave like a robot. He came over and he told me, “Serve him quick and don't talk to him; he's gay”, but he spoke in his language so the man wouldn't understand.

The gentleman, he felt something is wrong and he said to me, “Is everything all right?” The Boss answered, “Yes Mike, everything is all right.” The man, he said, “I'm not Mike, I'm Howard.” I explained him that the boss means “mate” but he can't pronounce it. Howard smiled and said, “thank you” to him and he left a two-pound tip for me then went out, but he left his umbrella. My Boss took the tip and told me, “I'll buy a bulb for your room.” I said, “This is my money. That man he always leave a tip.” But the Boss is a hard man who treat his workers like slaves, so I say to him, “If you want to take it why don't you buy toilet paper? I have a bulb in my room.” Then to patronize me he said, “Maybe you like to join Mr Howard tonight” with winking his eye.

At this point two people came in, each holding a bottle of beer. They were big chubby men with bald heads and they were so drunk that they couldn't control their movements. They are shouting, “Fucking foreigners” to each other so my Boss said to me, “Be very nice with them. If they said, ‘Fuck you’, your answer will be ‘thank you very much, do you like anything else?’” I told him, “I can't do that and I can't serve them”, so he said, “When they have ordered, you do the order - I'll speak with them.”

The men came up to the counter and one of them said, “Why did you come here, fucking donkey shagger?” The boss in his pronunciation, said, “Calm down, mike.” The man replied, “Fuck off, I'm not Mike, I'm Nick” and the other one he says, “They come here to shag young girls and marry them to get citizenship.”

The Boss, who thinks he is a great important man, couldn't get rid of two bullyboys. He said, “No mike, I'm a religious person; it is not in my culture to shag girls.” This makes the second man very angry and he shouted, “He's not Mike you c***.” And then he says to the Boss, “So you're Muslim?” and he replies that he is. This drunk man then said, “I thought you lot weren't supposed to eat pork, why are you selling it then?” The Boss says back to him, “That's business.”

Now the first man is more angry even than the other one and he threw

his bottle and it breaks into pieces; spread over the shop, and he said, “You got a problem, Mohammed?” The Boss said to him, “I am not Mohammed, I am Mustapha, my friend”. The first drunk man shouted, “He's not your friend, he's my friend.” The boss, he replied to him, “Ok, mate.” But he said “mike” again because he cannot pronounce, “mate”. This man, he was very drunk, he said to him, “My name's not fucking Mike. Fuck you!” The boss he say, “Thank you very much, what you like?”

The second man say, “That's what he calls his donkey when he's shagging it!” Then he was holding onto the counter and he was pretended to be having sex that way; like Mustapha and his donkey, called Mike. He was saying, “Oh Mike, oh Mike”. At this moment Howard comes back for his umbrella. He realised there is something wrong and he becomes a mediator between my Boss and them when he explained to them when he saying to you “Mike” he is means “mate”.

Before the two boys leave the kebab shop one of them says to the Boss raising his voice, “The customer's always right Mikel!” The boss said, “Yes, yes, yes”. Howard advised him he should call the police. The Boss says “many times event like that happened to me - when I call police they come too late and when they come they accuse me instead of them.” I said, “And we are all fucking illegal immigrants and by their police law we are the crime-makers.”

Howard said, “I understand now. Good luck for you.” and he left the shop. I say to the Boss, “Now can you see?” I.I.



The latest edition of *Imagine*, the Socialist Party of Canada's journal, is out now. Cheque or money order for £1 (including postage) to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

A simpler way of doing things

Capitalism makes arranging production more complicated than it need be.

We humans have always worked to support our life; worked to catch, grow and produce our food, to make our shelter, our clothes and our tools, in general to satisfy our needs. In groups tasks were shared and communities developed by dividing labour cooperatively according to expertise and free will. All worked both for themselves and the common good whilst partaking of the benefits accrued.

We still work to support our life but now money is a crucial factor, an artificial intermediary between labour and the satisfaction of needs, enabling labour to be exchanged indirectly for all manner of goods and services. We now require money whether working within the community or outside it. We do our work as farmer, builder, designer, cook or computer operator using our particular skill, the difference now being we are probably working away from our community and contributing little to it except socially in our spare time and often it isn't the precise community of our choice but the one we can afford in monetary terms. Moreover, we work most of our life for an employer or series of employers who pay us more on paper than our net salary or take home pay with the remainder being passed on to various government agencies which, in turn, give us some back as health care, unemployment pay and various benefits and pensions as time, situation or entitlement dictate.

Without workers there is neither a product nor a service to sell and therefore no money is generated for the system, no money is generated to produce profit for the capitalists. Also, without worker input neither national nor local governments have money

of their own. They are financed only by what they collect from employers in direct taxation and deductions for employees gross pay and from indirect taxes. The tax on employers comes from profit remaining after paying their bills and invoices for utilities, goods, raw materials, other overheads and the wages bill, all of which profit has been generated by the workforce. The deductions from employees' pay also comes from the surplus generated by the workers but it forms a part of the overall sum that the employer is prepared to pay for the labour rendered.

Net pay is what is deemed sufficient and appropriate according to the type of employment. The difference in amount between gross and net pay, that which is utilised as deductions, (all of which is paid by the employer), is a deal struck between government and employers with some negotiation by trades unions on behalf of the employees. (The employee always striving for a larger remuneration in opposition to the employer looking to reduce it as much as possible.)

Gross pay, to a certain extent, appeases workers because they perceive themselves to be earning more than they are, although they generally believe they are being robbed on a regular basis, seeing a considerable amount clawed back from what they maintain they have rightfully earned. Statistics show that what is transferred from gross pay to the Inland Revenue and the National Insurance scheme more or less goes back to workers as various benefits and payments.

Defence, policing, health, education and roads, and the wages of the whole hierarchy of "public servants" from Prime Minister and Lord of the Admiralty to lowly office clerk, ambulance driver and teaching assistant all come ultimately from the surplus workers generate for their employers as profits. The

same goes for all the buildings and upkeep of the same, for the heating, lighting, cleaning, furnishings and all materials, vehicles – in fact everything used in their operations from stealth fighter to paper clip.

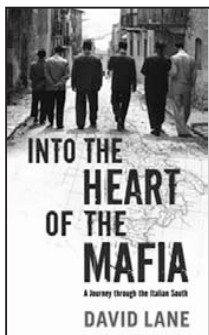
Today's capitalist world is much more complicated and intertwined than that of our ancestors. We rely on international trade for many commodities and use ultra-sophisticated technology to allow us to track transactions worldwide, technology which, in theory, should simplify most matters, yet somehow we have become entangled in an overcomplicated web from which it is difficult to see a way out. Some say there is no way out of the present system. Our worker may disagree. If workers accept that they have to work in order to live their life – and the vast majority do – does that mean that we also have to accept the incredible complications that capitalism and working for money involve (and that have certainly led to the miserable times many workers are now suffering in the latest financial crisis)? Can we not simply produce things directly for use, working for ourselves and the common good too, knowing that others will be doing the same?

Those who work – those who produce the useful things and provide the useful services – are the lynch pin, the vital component. They are indispensable. The capitalist, the employer is dispensable. Removing layers of unnecessary top-heavy bureaucracy, removing any necessity for taxation by removing the blight of money is the far simpler way. The nurse will tend the sick, the plumber will ensure no leaks, the farmer will provide food and the unemployed will no longer be unoccupied for there is much to be done cooperatively within all our communities. And plenty enough, too, for all to partake of the fruits of our collective labour.

JANET SURMAN

Guns and protection

David Lane: *Into the Heart of the Mafia*. Profile £15.



I didn't expect a book on the Mafia to be all that interesting or relevant, but in fact Lane's investigation can be interpreted as shedding some light on the operations of capitalism.

Italy became a unified state fairly late on, in 1861, and the south of the country was for a long time isolated and barely under the control of the central government in Rome. As a result, a sort of private police force filled the vacuum and administered its own kind of 'justice'. Basically, a set of thugs and gangsters, they evolved into the Mafia, a term which covers at least the Cosa Nostra in Sicily, the Camorra in Campania and the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria.

Their activities now include robbery and murder, loan sharking, extortion and protection money. Anything that involves money-making attracts them, such as the university in Messina on Sicily, which is the town's biggest business. The construction industry, and public works in general, is another area where the Mafia can extract money. It's estimated that about half of the £24 billion paid for reconstruction after an earthquake near Naples in 1980 ended up in the hands of the Camorra. Burying toxic waste with no regard for the environmental consequences also brings in big profits. All this goes on with the connivance of many in business, government and the Catholic church.

The south of Italy still represents a relatively unattractive place for companies to invest in, since a return on investment requires a level of security that is mostly lacking. Capitalism, then, needs its version of law and order, and the Mafia-controlled regions are a clear demonstration of what can happen when this does not exist.

For the working class, the consequence of Mafia rule are dire, with very high levels of unemployment and high drop-out rates from school. With legal jobs hard to come by, many are attracted to work for the Mafia. Someone who

then wishes to break free may be killed as a warning to others. At the same time, though, members of agricultural cooperatives farming ex-Mafia land show a great deal of courage in resisting sabotage and intimidation.

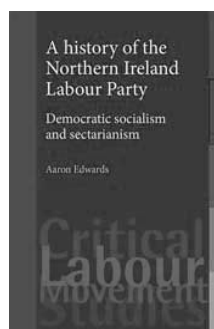
As one of Woody Guthrie's songs says, 'Some will rob you with a six gun and some with a fountain pen'. There is more than one way for workers to be exploited and oppressed, and the Mafia are the way of the six gun.

PB

Labour loyalists

A History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party: Democratic Socialism and Sectarianism.

By Aaron Edwards. Manchester University Press



The reference in the title to 'Democratic Socialism' might well have been an acceptable tautology on the part of the author or, as it frequently is, a manifestation of

misunderstanding of the meaning of socialism. In the case of this author's work (it was quickly demonstrated not only that he has peculiar ideas as to what represented socialism, but in dealing with the political events in Northern Ireland that are the background to his narrative, he is, also, below par regarding the acceptable nature of what passes for democracy in liberal bourgeois society.

The term 'socialism' was first used to define an *alternative* form of social organisation to capitalism. There already existed alternative political and economic suggestions for treating the myriad problems associated with capitalism but within the consensus of those who used the term 'socialism' was the conviction that such suggestions were inadequate or unworkable. What was required was the total dismantling of the system of class monopoly of the means of life and its replacement with a system of common ownership and free access to goods and services.

The more politically coherent elements among the reformers, liberals and trade unionists that formed the British Labour Party

in 1906 would have accepted the need to *replace* capitalism with socialism but they thought they could circumvent the essential need to create a democratic socialist consciousness to achieve that purpose. Instead they would, by an ongoing and gradual process, reform capitalism out of existence. Their error is transparent in the bunch of self-seeking careerists and ruthless authoritarian Labour politicians currently grasping with yet another of the crises of capitalism.

Following the partition of Ireland by the British government in 1921 some disparate elements from a Northern Ireland community deeply divided into forms of conditioned politico-religious hatreds re-energised residual Labour support under the banner of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). The Party would have attracted the same elements as the British party but would have carried the baggage of political and religious division within its ranks. Contrary to Edwards contention it never made a class analysis of Irish politics; instead it joined the ward-healing process while nervously tiptoeing its way through the minefield of tribal divisions that were the political stock-in-trade of everyday political life in its territory.

Still, those divisions were reflected acutely within the NILP. Catholics, who almost exclusively suffered the tyrannies of the notorious Unionist government's Special Powers Act (a sort of Complete Dictator's DIY kit) as well as discrimination in employment and social housing, wanted a determined stand against these evils which would seem good political fodder for a reformist group. In this work the author further betrays his ignorance of socialism as well as his ambivalence to democracy by his sympathy with the NILP leadership's view that a fulsome condemnation of anti-Catholic practices might alarm potential Protestant voters who supported these evils.

In the late 1940s, having failed to achieve meaningful political kudos from its fence-sitting position the Party openly adopted a Unionist position. Ulster Labour, it proclaimed was British Labour. In a display that would have rivalled that of the National Front, Labour election platforms, in *Unionist areas*, were festooned with Union flags, which traditionally was the banner carried by the Orange mob. The decision caused a major split in the Party; Catholics, reflecting the same political ignorance as their erstwhile 'comrades', formed the Irish Labour

Association (long since demised) predictably under the banner of the Irish tricolour. Curiously, no mention of this latter happening is found in the book.

In the 1950s the NILP won four seats in the Northern Ireland House of Commons. The new MP's were all men, proclaimed as good men on the strength of their Protestant fundamentalist faith. Eventually, as traditionalist Nationalist politics went into terminal decline before more strident Catholic demands for the democratisation of the Northern Ireland state, there was an influx of Catholics back into the NILP. Again the Party's internal unease surfaced: the Catholics more and more favouring direct action against the Stormont regime in which Labour's four holy men were comfortably ensconced to the extent where one had accepted a white-washing position with the government.

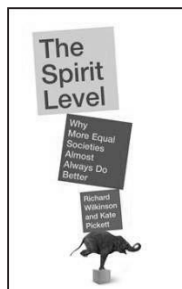
The prelude to open sectarian conflagration in Northern Ireland left the gaping sectarian wounds of the NILP increasingly exposed and finally inflicted their *coup de grace* on its squalid political corpse. Edwards intones the requiem with the acknowledgement of numbers of its members cosying up to the sectarian murder gangs; a measure of what they had learnt in the NILP. His belated obsequies will find little sympathy with genuine socialists but should serve as a warning for those who put political expediency before principle.

Edwards is a Senior Lecturer in Defence and International Affairs at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.

RM

Unequal society

The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better.
Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. Allen Lane, 2009.



The main theme of this book, as summarised in its subtitle, is that people living in less unequal societies almost always do better than those living in more unequal societies. This

unsurprising theme is spelled out in the nine chapters in the middle

part of the book dealing with the costs of inequality in various areas of life and society: community life and social relations; mental health and drug use; physical health and life expectancy; obesity; educational performance; teenage births; violence; imprisonment and punishment; and social mobility.

The first part of the book—titled Material Success, Social Failure—is an uncontroversial, even anodyne commentary on where we are now. Material success is a privilege of the minority: “the least well-off people even in the richest countries sometimes find themselves without enough money for food.”

Socialists are more likely to be interested in what the authors have to say in Part 3, A Better Society. Wilkinson and Pickett present themselves as good people with good ideas writing of the “need to create more equal societies able to meet our real social needs.” I particularly like the cartoon they reproduce of a rich, portly father explaining to his small son, “It goes in cycles, Junior. Sometimes the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Sometimes the rich get richer and the poor stay the same.”

But the authors are really not as radical as they pretend. They like the charitable, friendly society, mutual, credit-union side of capitalism more than the openly profit-seeking side. They want a nice capitalism, not a nasty one. So when it comes to “what can be done?” they list reforms like “plug loopholes in the tax system, limit ‘business expenses’, increase top tax rates, and even legislate to limit maximum pay in a company to some multiple of the average or lowest paid.”

SRP



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Meetings

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Harborne Hall, Birmingham, Friday 26 to Sunday 28 June

A WEEKEND OF TALKS AND DISCUSSION ON REVOLUTION: THE THEORIES, THE PAST, THE FUTURE

This year's speakers and talks are as follows:

Gwynn Thomas: RESISTANCE FROM BELOW: RIOT, REVOLT AND REBELLION IN THE PRE-MODERN WORLD

Adam Buick: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: A MODEL NOT TO FOLLOW

Andy Davies: BUILDING A WORLD SOCIALIST CONSCIOUSNESS

Janet Surman: THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

Simon Wigley: THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

Arrival is from 4.30pm on Friday, and the event finishes after lunch on Sunday, at around 2.30pm.

All welcome, including non-residents.

East Anglia

Saturday 11 July 12-4pm

Branch Meeting

Reindeer Pub, 10 Dereham Road. Norwich.

Manchester Branch

Monday 22 June, 8.30 pm

‘Can Socialism Solve the Problems of Capitalism?’

Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

Lothians Discussion Group

(under the auspices of the Socialist Party's Edinburgh Branch)

Venue: ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh

Every 4th Wednesday of the Month

Time: 7.30pm-9.00pm

Contact:

Fraser Anderson: Fraser@prolerat.org

Jimmy Moir: jimmy@prolerat.org

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case

Robert Barltrop

FORMER MEMBER Robert Barltrop died on 26 April after a short illness. He joined the SPGB in 1946 as Robert Coster. A prolific speaker and writer for the Party, his work including the pamphlet *Schools Today* (1959). He resigned in 1959, before drifting into the fringes of the anarchist movement, and for a time even became an independent local councillor before rejoining the Party in 1970. He wrote prolifically for the *Socialist Standard* (and drew its first ever cartoon-strip feature), also serving for several years on the editorial committee. He left again in 1982.

Born in 1922, in his youth, he was, amongst other things, an enthusiastic boxer, and always retained an interest in the pugilistic arts. He worked as a school-teacher. He was an excellent artist, especially line drawing, and an expert in calligraphy. Very proud of his London heritage, he wrote several books on the cockney patois, a pride also reflected in three short autobiographical works published by Waltham Forest Library and in his regular weekly column in the *Newham Recorder*. He also notably wrote a book on the American author Jack London.

He was best known though for his work *The Monument* (1975), which remains a fascinating and entertaining introduction to the

history of the SPGB. The book was largely written in the 1960s while he was out of contact with the Party, which explains the contentiousness of some of its many stories, anecdotes and perceptions.

Robert Barltrop was a controversial figure in the Party but he was always very civil to younger members who had not crossed swords with him politically. With him vanishes a great London character.

KAZ

Socialist Standard

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The Snoopers



A FURORE arose recently in the readers' letters column of the *Daily Mirror*, when an article revealed that there were thousands of people employed by Finance Companies whose job it was to snoop into people's lives, and report on would-be hire purchase customers' credit reliability (. .)

Most people look upon snooping as an unsavoury occupation, but do not see where the real unsavouriness lies. This kind of activity is an essential part of property society, a society which provides even more unsavoury occupations, such as the policeman who breaks strikers' heads with his truncheon, or the soldier mangling workers of other countries. The jobs themselves are not likely to ennoble the characters of the performers, but this is not the main issue. They are carrying out a necessary function of an irrational and harmful social order, and one which exemplifies the sheer idiocy of the social organisation.

What sensible reason can there be for an arrangement whereby some workers produce goods, other workers advertise them, yet more workers arrange them in gaudy

shop-windows, more workers fill in hire purchase forms, even more run the complicated accounting and collecting system of the finance companies, some more occupy their time snooping into the buyers' lives, others add up the bosses' profit, a few store it away in bank vaults, and finally, a tiny section of the population live more than comfortably on the proceeds?

Surely a simpler and less wasteful arrangement is called for? Why should a vast number of people have to perform useless and frustrating tasks, in order to satisfy the selfish wishes of a ruling clique? Yet it is working people themselves who perpetuate this foolish system: who do the useless tasks as well as the useful; the unproductive as well as the productive.

The trouble is that the alternative, a world of common ownership and common effort, is frightening in its simplicity. It seems too easy to be true. Nevertheless, true it is. It's as simple as that!

(from an article by A.W.I. in the *Socialist Standard*, June 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

A different kind of politics

Politics has become a dirty word, but that's because we leave it to professional politicians.

Most political groups today use the word “socialism” to refer to a brand of Leftist politics advocating things such as nationalization of industries, higher taxes for the rich, greater participation of trade unions in government, more spending on social programmes, and greater control of the economy by the state. These so-called socialists of the Left, in common with all the other political parties of the Right and the Centre, look at all the world's problems – hunger and malnutrition, poverty, unemployment, epidemics, war, genocide – and they tell us none of them can't be solved by putting them in charge of the system. If only they could change the laws, set the budgets, and liaise with the other world leaders, they say, things would be better. And so we vote these politicians into power – again and again and again – and still, over the decades and centuries, the problems are still with us.

However, the Socialist Party is not a party of the Left, and doesn't advocate any of their political reforms. When *we* talk about socialism, we mean one thing and one thing only: a world-wide, democratically organized system of society without states, leaders, markets, and money. We believe that society at large, not governments or a small minority of private owners, should own and control the means of producing and distributing wealth. We believe that production of goods and provision of services should take place not for profit but rather directly to satisfy human needs. We believe that labour should be voluntary, not coerced, and that people should have free access to the goods produced by society. This isn't the mere tinkering with taxation and budgets and laws which is all the other political groups want to do---what we want is a fundamental, revolutionary change in the way society is organized.

What exactly do we mean when we talk about the means of producing and distributing wealth being owned in common? By “the means of producing and distributing wealth”, we're not talking about personal possessions like your house or your clothes or your toothbrush. Rather, we're talking about the forests, farms, mines, and oceans from which natural wealth is extracted; the factories in which it's processed; the transportation networks, such as roads and railways, that carry these goods across the Earth; and the distribution centres, such as warehouses and department stores from which we collect these goods for our own use. Currently, all these things are owned and controlled by a tiny minority of the world's population. If these owners can't find out a way of turning a profit out of the sale of the goods, then they don't get produced or distributed, no matter how much people need them. This is why millions of people all over the world have little or no access to the food, water, medicine, and shelter they need to stay alive. It's not because we lack the resources or the capacity to produce these things, but because it's not profitable to do so.

On the other hand, capitalism seems to be very good at churning out loads of goods that nobody needs at all. Instead of finding out what it is that people need and then producing the goods to meet that need, a large part of energy in our present society is focussed on coming up with all manner of new gadgets, gimmicks, and other shoddy merchandise, and *then* convincing people that

they need them. The entire system is back-to-front! You just can't walk down the street today, or turn on the television or radio, or open a newspaper or web page, without being constantly bombarded with billboards, commercials, banner ads, inserts, leaflets, coupons, sandwich boards, posters, stickers, infomercials, and spam, all trying to convince you that you *need* to buy whatever hyped-up product du jour they're flogging. A lot of the time these products are of such inferior quality that they don't work as advertised, or end up breaking after a few months or years.

In a socialist society, though, all the means of producing and distributing wealth would be democratically owned and controlled by society at large. That means that every one of us would have the right to participate in decisions about how to organize the production of goods and services. And in any sane technologically advanced society, there is no reason why the sole object of production would not be simply to meet people's self-determined needs with the very best goods we know how to make. This would entail an end to buying, selling and money. We already have the resources and the technology to supply every single human being on this planet with all the material goods that they need for a comfortable, pleasant, enjoyable life. All we lack is the system of society that would permit this to happen.

So how do we establish this new system of society? The Socialist Party does not believe in achieving socialism through coercion or through violent seizure of power by a revolutionary vanguard. That's no basis upon which to build a fair and democratic society. No, the only way that socialism as we understand it could be set up and run is through the consent and cooperation of an overwhelming majority of the world's population. And the only way we will know once there is such a majority is when it says so via the ballot. It is then, and only then, that we will know that the time is ripe for socialist revolution. It is then that we can start dismantling the coercive machinery of government and start taking control of the things we need to make society function in our own interests.

Capitalism cannot meet the needs of the majority of the people in the world. It does not today, and it never can, no matter how much well-meaning politicians might try to make it. Rather, we are asking you to understand and agree with our analysis of why the world is the way it is today, and why the entire world-wide system of capitalism needs to be replaced with socialism.

TRISTAN MILLER





The Failure Of Reformism

The Socialist Party have always argued that a policy of reforming capitalism by a series of legislative acts while leaving intact the basis of this class-divided society is doomed to failure. The Labour Party and other reformist organisations have maintained that this is the only way to deal with social problems. So what do these reformers make of the following report? "Millions of people have been condemned to live under "social apartheid" by 30 years of poor housing policies, a damning report on council estates will say this week. The 107-page report, to be published on Friday, condemns successive governments for pushing poorer people into what it condemns as "social concentration camps" set away from private housing, jobs and shops. Children born on such estates are more likely to end up unemployed, suffer mental health problems and die younger than their counterparts in private housing, says the study by the Fabian Society. ... According to the Fabians, children bought up in social housing now have far fewer life chances than half a century ago, because they are concentrated on increasingly ghettoised estates. Those born after 1970 in council homes are twice as likely to suffer from mental health problems than those born in 1946 in public housing, 11 times more likely to be unemployed and not in training or education, and nine times more likely to live in a household where nobody has a job." (*Independent*, 3 May) It is somewhat ironic that this report has been prepared by the Fabians - an organisation whose very basis is one of a policy of reformism!

Not So Boastful Now

Not so many years ago it used to be the boast of industrialists and politicians alike "What is good for General Motors is good for America". This simplistic mantra was always trotted out in defence of capitalism during the post war boom of US industry and trade but supporters of US capitalism will have to look elsewhere for consolation today. "General Motors, North America's biggest carmaker, reported a \$6bn first-quarter net loss and an accelerating cash drain on Thursday, underlining the pressure it faces to gain concessions from stakeholders or face bankruptcy. The troubled automaker warned that prolonged uncertainty over its financial condition risks creating a vicious circle of shaky consumer confidence and falling production and sales." (*Financial Times*, 7 May) It is in no sense in a "told you so" mood that socialists note the boom and slump nature of capitalism has asserted itself once more. After all it is our fellow workers in the US and elsewhere who will have to bear the prospect of unemployment, re-possession and insecurity. What we ask the working class to do is to consider the socialist alternative to this mad market system. We asked you to do so during the boom. We continue to ask you to do so during the slump.

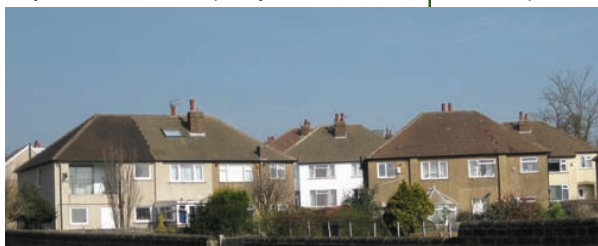
The Failure Of Labour

One of the illusions fostered by the Labour Party is that for all its shortcomings at least it is better than the Tories, but recent evidence seems to point out that even this modest claim is erroneous. "That relative poverty - the gap between rich and poor rather than the absolute availability of basic necessities - should be higher than it was when Harold Macmillan was prime minister is a galling discovery. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, a sort of non-partisan unofficial opposition

party equipped with massive brainpower, tells us that the distance between our richest and our least fortunate citizens is as high as it has been since their data starts, in 1961. Which leaves open the possibility that Brown's Britain may be more unequal than we were before the creation of the NHS and the modern welfare state." (*Independent*, 8 May)

World Poverty

From time to time everybody receives a charity appeal. It may be posted through your door or a leaflet in a newspaper. We receive so many of them that we tend to become a bit blasé about the whole charity thing, but a recent appeal from the *Plan* charity contained some particularly harrowing statistics. "It's a tragic reality that one in five children born in the poorest countries won't live to see their 5th birthday. ... 600 million children worldwide live on less than 70p a day - that's ten times the UK population. Working for more than 70 years and with over 100,000 child sponsors in the UK alone, *Plan* aims to help more children realise their full potential - and improve the lives of future generations." Despite the sincerity and undoubted humanity of the *Plan* people the problem has got worse in the last 70 years. Workers contributing a pittance to relieve the problem of world hunger is pointless. What we need is a transformation in the basis of society to one where all food, clothing and shelter is produced solely to satisfy human needs not to make a profit.



Free Lunch

by Rigg



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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 4 July** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
tel: 020 7622 3811
e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

The passing show

The media has recently worked itself into a frenzy over the authority of the Prime Minister. The Euro-elections followed a spate of cabinet resignations. Every statement, coded phrase, nod and wink from the apparatchiks has been analysed. Whose side is Mandelson on? Will Milliband break ranks? And even, what's that badge that Blears is wearing? Kremlinologists used to try and find out what was happening in state capitalist USSR by analysing the seating positions of the party functionaries. A similar game of smoke, mirrors, cloaks and daggers appears to apply to the "democracies" of modern capitalism.

This focus on the minutiae of our leaders is what passes for democracy around the world. Democratic decision-making has become a spectator sport. We'd be as well reading our tea-leaves to find out what's happening. Jeremy Paxman could read the entrails of a chicken on Newsnight for all it matters. And as the column inches grow and the 24-hour rolling news channels multiply, year after year fewer people bother to vote.

It is in any case only every couple years or so that we get our hands on the stub of a pencil to register our pitiful preference. A few dozen crosses is your lifetime quota to express your opinion. In the time between voting, wars can start, economies may implode and climates change. And you can bet these issues won't all have appeared on the manifestos.

For world socialists, the presence of leaders is the antithesis of genuine democracy. The dominance of the market system must be removed before genuine participative democratic decision-making is possible. Crucially however it must not be forgotten that this is only achievable on the basis of majority support for socialism, by which we mean a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless society based on producing wealth for human need not the profit of a few.

But while the democracy that capitalism provides (at least in most developed nations) is a pale imitation of the real thing, in our view it is usually still sufficient to be used to help bring about the end of capitalism.

That doesn't mean that such a transformation would be restricted to parliament (far from it – the transformation to socialism will obviously resonate across all parts of society, and in many different ways). But it does mean that any movement set on democratic revolution should not ignore the machinery of government but instead call the bluff of the democratic credentials of the capitalist state. Alongside many other developments in the wider revolutionary movement, politically we need to set out with the intent to use the shoddy political mechanism of capitalism, albeit for one purpose only, that of expressing the majority support for the ending of capitalism.



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Chimps, Chumps & Cheetahs

As evolved and unintelligently-designed bald chimps everywhere must surely know, this year is the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth. However they may be less aware that it is also claimed to be the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's sonnets, the 300th anniversary of the start of the industrial revolution and, perhaps less debatably, the 50th birthday for the Mini automobile (www.culture24.org.uk/history/art66265).

Crowning all these trivial achievements this month is of course the 40th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. What can one say of this historic event? At the time it was hard to overhype. One small step for a man, one giant poke in the eye for the Russians, it supposedly gave us velcro, teflon and digital watches, but more to the point, it promised to launch the bone-throwing chimp species, Kubrick-like, into the galaxy.

And, er, that was it. Apollo the space overture was not followed by the opera. Since then the veterans who knew how to get to the moon have all died or retired, and now the tyro NASA chimps are back where they started, arguing about rockets and facing Obama funding cuts instead of Kennedy largesse.

What did it all mean? Not much, except to show that in science, as in share prices, optimism can overrun the cliff-edge of experience, a fact which often escapes young chimps who imagine that scientific progress is secure, inevitable and limitless. Perhaps this is because, in the non-scientific world, we don't tend to hear about the null results, the blind alleys or the dead-ends, we only hear the success-stories. This may mean, argues NASA climatologist Peter Dizikes, that we foster unrealistic expectations of science in practice: "The way we teach science is that Newton said "X" and it's correct, so learn this formula. This promotes the idea that science knows all the answers. Whereas when you look at any actual working scientist, whether it's in climate change or medicine or building a nuclear power plant, the stock in trade of science is uncertainty; it's not certainty" (www.salon.com, 19 June).

It doesn't help that capitalism is all about hard sells not hard truths, a blizzard of con rackets, snake oil cures, kwik-fixes and pseudo-solutions that all too easily make us into chumps who forget to ask the right questions. Too often the media will breathlessly report anything scientists offer them, without any provisos or qualifications, just to grab a slice of reader attention. Grey areas require grey matter, but who's got the time? To take a random sample of the latest news items, we learn, 'according to new studies', that boys who have a 'warrior gene' are more likely to end up in violent gangs (Yahoo News, 5 June), that squeamish people are more likely to be conservative (Yahoo News, 5 June) and that engineers are more likely to become terrorists (*New Scientist*, 13 June). There is not space here to detail all the ways in which these studies may be misleading, misguided



or plain wrong, but sample size, experimenter expectation and the possible existence of conflicting studies would be three avenues to explore for starters.

A possible fourth is fraud. When politicians or bankers turn out to be corrupt nobody raises an eyebrow. When catholic priests

turn out to be kiddy-fiddlers the world reacts with weary resignation. But when scientists fiddle data everyone throws up their hands in shocked amazement, because scientists are for some reason expected to be above that sort of thing.

Yet there are some legendary cases of scientific fraud, and it turns out that the latest and as yet unnamed addition to the periodic table, element 112, was held back from recognition by years because one member of the team was sabotaging the results by falsifying data (*New Scientist*, 20 June). Worse, scientific fraud may not be rare but commonplace. A recent survey involving over 11,000 academics found a third of scientists admitting to 'massaging' research data and one in fifty indulging in outright fakery: "When scientists were asked about colleagues' behaviour, 14 percent said they had witnessed research fraud and almost three-quarters said they had seen questionable behaviour". Socialists won't be surprised to learn that "misconduct was most common in clinical, medical and pharmacological research, where large grants are often at stake" (TimesOnline, 7 June). Naughty chimps! Me Tarzan, you Cheetah.

Or should that be naughty orang-utans? A new paper that flies boldly in the face of the genetic evidence suggests that humans are biologically closer to the red apes than to chimps or bonobos, an idea which is causing widespread splutterings of derision in the scientific community. Nevertheless *New Scientist* (20 June) sees fit to lead with a lofty editorial on why we should welcome scientific heresy, even if it's wrong: "Alternative hypotheses should be given an airing ... science that pulls up the drawbridge on new ideas risks becoming sterile." How true, even if it does sound a little defensive from a journal which is drawing fire for being too sensational and populist.

But heresy is risky, and scientists can be as conservative and risk-averse as anyone else. Privately many scientists could put together the same 'heresy' socialists propose, which is that capitalism, once the friend and sponsor of good science, now is more its enemy than its ally. It controls the funds and the fundamentals, it calls the tunes, it forms the corrupting context in which science does its work. In a capitalist world where politicians are vile, bankers are venal and priests are paedophiles, it can hardly be a revelation to find that science is as bent as everything else. But will they speak out against the system which holds them in check? Not while they have a vested interest in not doing so. That's why we have to do it for them.

Hypocrisy over immigration

Dear Editors

The perpetual media discussion about immigration, conveniently forgets the countless numbers of people who have migrated from the British Isles (including Ireland when it was part of the British Isles) over the past 400 years. When one considers for example that the current population of the Republic of Ireland is some seven million approximately, while the current Irish descendant population in the USA alone is estimated to be around seventy million (to say nothing of the Irish descendants in the other former "black" countries of Canada/ New Zealand/Australia/South Africa, etc, etc), the hypocrisy of the anti-immigrant debate becomes evident.

The same applies to the so called "white British" historical emigration to "black" countries around the world. The white British descendant population in East and South Africa, Oceania, North and South America etc runs into countless dozens of millions.

Further this debate ignores the fact that Britain was built exclusively on the profits generated by slavery and the pillaging of its colonies. Prior to the 16th century England was an impoverished backwater – even Christopher Columbus when he was trawling the Royal Courts of Europe to fund his New World adventure, never considered asking the English Court for assistance, as England was the Haiti of Europe at the time.

Anti-immigrant types need to acquaint themselves with their own history. Many of them fail to even appreciate that they themselves are recent arrivals in the British Isles –

their Anglo-Saxon invader ancestors were not here when the Romans with their British based African regiments, were building Hadrian's Wall. The immigration debate needs to have these facts discussed.

Lalu Hanuman, Barbados

Reply:

We get your point, even if there is some exaggeration. For instance, the population of the Republic of Ireland is about 4 million not 7 million. And the wealth of British capitalism was not built "exclusively" on the profits of slavery and the pillaging of its colonies. This was certainly a key factor in the original accumulation of capital to start capitalism going, but after that the main source of profits was – and still is – the unpaid labour of the working class in Britain – *Editors.*

Who are the real litter louts?

Official statistics from the Home Office's Office of National Statistics show that there is a high level of concern about the problem of litter. Indeed, of all crime and anti-social behaviour litter has the second highest source of concern (33 percent of those surveyed felt "a high level of worry"). Vandalism comes top of the list (34 percent), both much higher than racial harassment (8 percent) and fear of burglary (14 percent). Hardly a week goes by without a letter sent to local papers on the subject. Now common or garden street litter is hardly one of the world's major problems, but most people are primarily concerned with things that affect them – it is simply a human response to something right before the eyes. People clearly want and indeed should expect a decent local environment. What can be done about this problem? We examine a few solutions . . .

Solution no. 1: More bins.

It might be suggested that more rubbish bins would solve the problem. Certainly this could have some effect. However my local area has plenty of bins (empty ones) and plenty of litter. Putting the rubbish in the bins is clearly something different from putting the bins up in the first place.

Solution no. 2: The strong arm of the law.

A crackdown on 'litter louts' – fines or imprisonment – can be a short term solution particularly in areas with a

traditional respect of authority. Such a policy has been carried out very successfully, for example in Singapore. However, whether large and disparate societies have the resources to deal with what is basically a minor infraction of the law in such a heavy-handed manner is doubtful.

Solution no. 3: Education.

A rather cheaper method than a policeman on every corner would be a concerted campaign in the schools: "Naughty children: don't throw things on the street." However education (or what passes for it in these sad times) seems to be part of the problem. It is almost certainly the case that the majority of street litter is thrown by children or adolescents.

Solution no. 4: 'Alternative' education.

If it really is the case that littering is a product of alienation in the schools it might be advisable to change the system of schooling to one more child-friendly. At the risk of us being deluged with letters from irate 'alt-ed' enthusiasts, the idea of 'nice' schooling is ridiculous in a world that is most definitely not nice. The modern system of education generally fits the bill required – that of producing (and reproducing) the ideal modern worker. Also again we hit the problem of resources – who will pay for this intensive, alternative approach?

Solution no. 5: A 'green' idea.

Very popular in Germany, the Green 'Law of Return' means that councils are



entitled to ship product wrappings back to the factory of origin. A ton of crisp packets dumped on the doorstep is a powerful argument for making biodegradable or recyclable packaging. This comes close to the problem and all credit here for identifying the real litter louts. But recycling uses resources – surely better, as far as is possible, not to produce potential litter in the first place; however, this cannot be expected from those whose business is to produce.

Solution no. 6: Socialism.

Litter, like most other problems of the world, is a product of the current phase of capitalism. Consumption to the nth power (including snack foods, the main cause of street litter), within a background of built-in obsolescence determined chiefly by the great corporations, is the order of the day, all driven by the relentless quest for profit. Compounding the issue within capitalism is the sense of alienation, especially among young people, the result of the class ownership of society and the commodifying of everyday life – all of which helps produce the carelessness of littering. Powerless and voiceless – why should the 'litter lout' care? The streets really are not our own, nor can they be under capitalism.

KAZ

Communism in Japan?



Communist
Party meeting in
Shibuya, March
2009



Surprisingly, the Communist Party of Japan still exists and, indeed, seems to be flourishing. Faced with the Japanese economy in steep decline, and ever-growing unemployment, many Japanese workers are, in the words of the *Guardian* (24 April), turning “to a new trend of cuddly communism”. But are they? Is the JCP educating common ownership, production for use instead of profit and the abolition of the wages system?

The Japanese Communist Party was formed in July, 1922, largely by anarcho-syndicalists who were quite influential among Japanese workers prior to 1914.

Between 1922 and the end of the second world war, in 1945, the JCP was an illegal organisation, with an underground membership which never exceeded 1,000. With legality it became a typical Leninist-Stalinist party, faithfully supporting the Soviet Union and advocating those reforms which it felt would

get support from the Japanese working class and, hopefully, bring it to power.

At first the JCP supported the American occupation, considering it a “liberating force”. Although considering Japan to be a highly developed capitalist state, it nevertheless claimed that all feudal remnants must be eliminated before proceeding to what it considered to be socialism – actually state capitalism.

By 1947 the Communist Party had 100,000 members; and in the 1949 general elections polled three million (10 percent) votes. By the time of the Korean war, the party ceased to collaborate with the American occupiers; and by 1951, it was reduced to a semi-legal status. With the Soviet-Chinese split, the JCP leadership tended to side with the People’s Republic of China, and was increasingly critical of Khrushchev. By 1965 all the pre-Soviet officials were expelled from the party.

Nevertheless, despite all its ideological problems, the Japanese Communist Party could claim almost 300,000 members in 1966. Later, it fell out with Mao and membership declined. It considered itself to be a completely independent, national Japanese party.

According to the *Guardian’s* Tokyo correspondent, Justin McCurry, “the JCP is barely recognisable from the party of 30 years ago”. It has seen its fortunes transformed after years of being dismissed as an irrelevant hangover from the Cold War. Membership is now said to be over 410,000, with around 15,000 joining since 2007, of which 25 percent are under 30. It is popular with students. The circulation of the party’s official paper, *Akahata* (“Red Flag”), has

increased from about one million six months ago to 1.6 million now, although in 1980 circulation topped 3.5 million.

The party owes some of its success to a novel, *Kaniksen* (“The Crab Factory Ship”), first published in 1929, and forgotten until last year when 500,000 copies were sold in a few months. It describes how fishermen rebelled against their bosses.

Need the Japanese capitalist class worry? I doubt it. It talks about welfare and jobs, and improving education. It has also made itself felt on the internet. With regard to the traditional Liberal Democratic Party, the JCP says: “We would co-operate on individual policies, but we wouldn’t be part of a coalition.” Of the 480-seat lower house of the Japanese parliament, the JCP has nine seats. It has, it proclaims, a commitment to “democratic change within the current framework of capitalism”. And not a word about communism/socialism.

PETER E. NEWELL

IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



AH, THE VIRTUES OF THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC...



... SO DEEPLY INGRAINED IN OUR CULTURE THAT WE DESPISE THOSE WHO DON'T WORK, UNLESS THEY'RE RICH, SAT ON A YACHT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN. THEN, WE RATHER ADMIRE THEIR LUXURIATING IN IDLENESS.



GREGORY 09

BUT IS HARD WORK QUITE THE NOBLE THING WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT TO BELIEVE? MAYBE BY NOT WORKING, WE'RE HURTING THE PLANET LESS THAN THOSE WHO DO. MAYBE BY WORKING HARD, YOU'RE JUST HURTING YOURSELF, AND HURTING THE ENVIROMENT.



... AND FOR THAT MATTER, WE COULD EASILY LIVE WITHOUT BANKERS, STOCKBROKERS AND MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS...

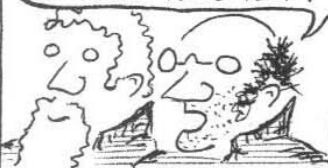


SUCH A HUGE AMOUNT OF OUR ENERGY IS WASTED ON THE PRODUCTION, PROMOTION AND SALE OF STUFF, SERVICES, WE DON'T REALLY WANT, OR NEED. ALL THIS TOTALLY UNNECESSARY HARD WORK. WE COULD HAPPILY LIVE WITHOUT IT...

HOW MUCH OF THE WORK THESE FOLKS DO IS REALLY USEFUL.. I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THAT PROFESSIONALS LIKE LAWYERS AND POLITICIANS DELIBERATELY CREATE A COMPLEX KIND OF RACKET TO KEEP THEMSELVES IN (WELL PAID) EMPLOYMENT. DID WE REALLY NEED THE LONDON ASSEMBLY?



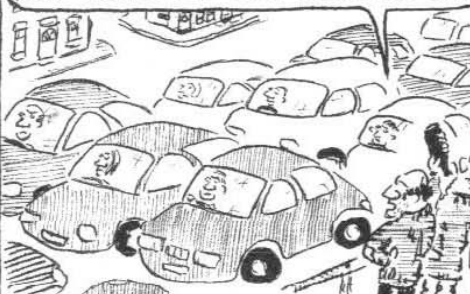
A LONG TIME AGO THOSE UTOPIAN VISIONARY FUTUROLOGISTS... WELLS, CLARKE ET AL, FORESAW A WORLD WHERE MACHINES WOULD FREE US ALL FROM THE DRUDGERY OF WORK...



OF COURSE, WORK SOMETIMES JUST FULFILLS A NEED. WITHOUT CRIME, WE'D HAVE NO POLICEMEN, SECURITY GUARDS, PRISON STAFF. WITHOUT ILLNESS, NO DOCTORS, NURSES, SURGEONS. WITHOUT WAR, NO SOLDIERS, SAILORS, OR THE WHOLE ROTTEN PARAPHERNALIA OF THE 'DEFENCE INDUSTRY' - ESPECIALLY IN THE U.S.A, A WHOLE SECTOR OF THE ECONOMY DEVOTED TO SOMETHING FAR WORSE THAN USELESS.



THEIR OPTIMISM SEEMS RATHER MISPLACED NOW. MACHINES JUST SEEM TO MAKE MORE WORK FOR US. LOOK AT PEOPLE SAT IN THEIR CARS IN A TRAFFIC JAM, AND BEHOLD HOW TECHNOLOGY HAS ENSLAVED US!



LIKewise, WE SURVIVED WELL ENOUGH BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE MOBILE PHONE, INTERNET, JET PLANE BUT NOW LIFE IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT THEM. THESE TECHNOLOGIES HAVE EFFECTIVELY EMASCULATED US! AND THEY ALL NEED PAYING FOR. SO WE'RE OBLIGED TO WORK, EVER HARDER, IT WOULD SEEM.

YOU KNOW, 'DOWNSIZING' SEEMS LIKE SUCH A MIDDLE CLASS CONCEIT. AFTER ALL, YOU NEED SOMETHING TO DOWNSIZE FROM! BUT MAYBE THERE'S SOMETHING IN IT. AND MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T RANK PEOPLE, AND OURSELVES, ON THE WORK WE DO...



Pieces together

MEGA-DEATH MARKETPLACE

"The annual Asia Security Conference, a forum for discussion, brought together some of the world's main arms-makers with military chiefs nervously eyeing their neighbors' moves and looking to upgrade defenses in a region full of long-running insurgencies, potential maritime disputes and growing wealth. 'Defense suppliers find it very important to be here to make a set of contacts,' said Jonathan Pollack, professor of Asian and Pacific Studies at the U.S. Naval War College. Japan's defense minister told the gathering that the country, anxious about North Korea's latest nuclear test, would not strike first but it was still looking to boost its air force with Lockheed Martin F-22 fighter jets. Top executives from firms such as Boeing, the Pentagon's No.2 defense supplier, flew to Singapore to rub shoulders with potential clients, as they look to expand foreign sales at a time when the Obama government is starting to cap defense project spending." (*Yahoo News*, 31 May)

TODAY'S PRICE OF OIL

"President Alan Garcia labored Saturday to contain Peru's worst political violence in years, as nine more police officers were killed in a bloody standoff with Amazon Indians fighting his efforts to exploit oil and gas on their native lands. The new deaths brought to 22 the number of police killed — seven with spears — since security forces moved early Friday to break up a roadblock manned by 5,000 protesters. Protest leaders said at least 30 Indians, including three children, died in the clashes. Authorities said they could confirm only nine civilian deaths, but cabinet chief Yehude Simon told reporters that 155 people had been injured, about a third of them with bullet wounds." (*Associated Press*, 6 June)

YESTERDAY'S PRICE OF OIL

"Royal Dutch Shell and the families of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an executed Nigerian opposition leader, and other activists hanged by the military government in 1995, on Monday agreed a \$15.5m settlement in a New York court case stemming from allegations the oil group was complicit in the executions. The settlement, in which Shell and its Nigerian subsidiary denied any liability, ended a 13-year campaign by relations and supporters of Saro-Wiwa to hold the company accountable. A spokesman for the plaintiffs said \$5m of the settlement to be paid by Shell would be put into a trust fund to promote education and welfare in the Ogoniland region of the Niger delta. The balance would be shared among 10 plaintiffs after legal costs were met. Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists were hanged after leading a campaign against Shell's activities in the region and the then military-led government. ...Oil production stopped in Ogoniland in 1993 when Shell ceased operations amid mass protests led by Saro-Wiwa against the environmental damage alleged to have been inflicted by the company's operations. The plaintiffs had alleged that at the request of Shell, and with its assistance and financing, Nigerian soldiers used deadly force and massive, brutal raids against the Ogoni people throughout the early 1990s to repress a movement against the oil company." (*Financial Times*, 9 June)

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Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 26th. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

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J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112

Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

Ayrshire. D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freemove.com

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Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

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cooking the books

Spot the difference

The BNP has an economic policy? Apparently, and it's not just send all non-white people (and Poles) back to where they came from and give their jobs to British workers. Their manifesto for last month's European elections said: "All the old parties are in the pockets of the banks and big business. Lab-Lib-Con all pretend to be worried about job losses but have allowed globalisation to destroy jobs and drag down wages . . . We will protect British jobs from cut-throat foreign competition and put British workers first – every time!"

How they propose to do this can be found on their website:

"Globalisation has caused the export of jobs and industries to the Far East, and has brought ruin and unemployment to British industries and the communities who depend on them. Accordingly, the BNP calls for the selective exclusion of foreign-made goods from British markets and the reduction of foreign imports. We will ensure that our manufactured goods are, wherever possible, produced in British factories, employing British workers. When this is done, unemployment in this country will be brought to an end and secure, well-paid employment will flourish." (<http://bnp.org.uk/tag/bnp-economic-policy/>)

That's easier said than done. Basically, it's a proposal to try to isolate capitalist Britain from the world market. But this couldn't be done without making things worse.

It is naïve to assume that if a British government imposed a "selective exclusion of foreign-made goods", i.e. protectionism, the governments of other capitalist countries would just take this lying down. They would adopt similar measures aimed at selectively excluding British, i.e. for them "foreign", imports. British manufacturing exports would be bound to suffer. Unemployment would return (if it ever disappeared) and "secure, well-paid employment" would wither not flourish.

The BNP was not the only party to advocate such a pie-in-the-sky policy as a supposed way to secure jobs and end unemployment. Here is what the No2EU list, led by Bob Crow of the RMT union and supported by the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*) and the ex-Militant Tendency Trotskyists:

"Nation states with the right to self-determination and their governments are the only institutions that can control the movement of big capital and clip the wings of the trans-national corporations and banks. . . . To revitalise the economy, Britain must return to creating wealth based especially in manufacturing, hi-tech and trade across the world . . . To return to an economy based on manufacturing requires massive investment and where appropriate protection of home industries. It is the only way to ensure jobs and a decent safe future for the peoples of Britain." (<http://www.no2eu.com/economiccrisis.html>)

They don't explain any more than the BNP where the profitable market for these extra manufacturing goods is to come from. They, too, dream of a national capitalism permanently providing high wages and steady jobs.

No wonder the groups that made up No2EU refuse to debate with the BNP. When it comes to economic policy, it wouldn't be much of a debate as they wouldn't find much to disagree about, especially as the BNP also advocates "the renationalisation of monopoly utilities and services, compensating only individual investors and pension funds". We, on the other hand, are prepared to debate against both of them (together if need be, to save time) and put the socialist case that, as capitalism is already a world system, there are no national solutions to the problems it causes for workers and that the only answer is go forward to world-wide socialism not back to the Nation State.

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Egging on the racists?

Who's *afraid* of the BNP?

The BNP's racist ideology is hateful and it is understandable – and to be welcomed – that most people don't like it. But what's the best way to deal with them?

Despite the high profile media campaign supported by the churches and all the other parties to try to stop this, the BNP did manage to get two MEPs elected to the European Parliament in last month's elections. The BNP is an obnoxious outfit and people are stupid to vote for it. It is no more able to provide an answer to workers' problems than the other parties. The problems facing working people and their families are not caused, as the BNP claims, by immigration or immigrants and will not be solved by the Fortress Britain they advocate with "British Jobs for British Workers". They are caused

by capitalism which the BNP, like the other parties, supports. Even if all immigration was stopped and all (recent) immigrants expelled this would not make things better for those the BNP calls the “indigenous population”.

The other parties had a cheek in asking people to vote for them to keep the BNP out. That’s because they all support capitalism and it is capitalism’s insoluble problems that the BNP exploits to gain votes. Voting for some other capitalist party to keep the BNP out is as stupid as voting for the BNP. That’s to vote to maintain the conditions which allow the BNP to flourish.

Others, on the Far Left, want to take a more confrontational attitude towards the BNP. They say it is a fascist party and that it should be physically “smashed” before it has a chance to smash political democracy. One problem with this is that the BNP is not a fascist party. Some of its leaders have expressed pro-Nazi sympathies in the past (and may well still harbour them) but, unlike the Nazi party in pre-1933 Germany, the BNP is not blaming parliamentary democracy for causing working-class problems. If it did, it wouldn’t get the votes it does. It blames workers’ problems on immigration and immigrants. So, it is anti-foreigner and racist, which is objectionable enough, but that’s not the same as fascism.

The only effective way to deal with the BNP is to confront *their arguments* head on and that includes their nationalism. The other parties cannot do this because they too are nationalists. The BNP is only expressing in an extreme form a nationalist position that they themselves share. They have even tried to steal the BNP’s clothes here by emphasising that they are against “illegal” immigrants and vie with each other to boast how many they have, or should have, deported. They encourage nationalism by describing members of the armed forces as “heroes” and by flying the Union Jack or even the

“The rivalry between the BNP and the Far Left can be seen as a rivalry between two leadership groups – one calling itself a ‘vanguard’, the other a ‘spearhead’”.

flag of St George (a traditional fascist emblem) on public buildings. All grist to the BNP’s mill.

Like the BNP, the other parties claim that all “British people” have a common interest as against the people of other countries, i.e. as against “foreigners”. But this is not the case. UK citizens are divided into two classes, on the basis of their relationship to the means of production – those who own them and those who don’t –, whose interests are quite opposed. It is in the interest of those who own Britain to convince the rest of us living here that we share a common interest with them in them acquiring and protecting outside markets and investment outlets. To get us to support them is the role of the nationalism that is inculcated into us from birth and reinforced every day by the media.

The semblance of justification for this is that, if employers are successful in this, then they can offer more and more secure jobs. In actual fact, however, those in



Defeat them how?

“What BNP members need is not a kicking, but putting right”

one country who have to work for a wage or a salary have a common interest with wage and salary workers in other countries rather than with our employers. That is the socialist, anti-nationalist position which the Socialist Party maintains against all other parties, not just the BNP.

Bash the Fash?

The Far Left have made two mistakes in trying to counter the BNP. The first has been to adopt a policy of physically fighting with them. The second has been to invoke the BNP as a bogey to try to gain recruits amongst post-war immigrants and their families.

Beating somebody up never changed anybody's mind. It probably reinforces their views. In any event, this is defeatist in assuming that people can't change their minds. Which, fortunately, has been disproved many times. For instance, the actor Ricky Tomlinson, who introduced the Scargill Labour Party's Party Political Broadcast in the recent elections, was once a member of the National Front, even a candidate for them in a local election. Now he thinks that the EU not immigrants cause working-class problems. Still wrong, but no longer a racist.

What BNP members need is not a kicking, but putting right. And the best way to do this is to confront the ideas of their leaders in open, public debate. That's why the Socialist Party is opposed to the policy of "No Platform for the BNP". On the contrary, we want them up on a platform to face socialist criticism of their erroneous ideas and futile policies.

Organising particular immigrants as a group, as the SWP tried to do with Muslims through Respect (before George Galloway threw them out and continued this with the aid of other Trotskyist groups), is dangerous and plays straight into the hands of the BNP by introducing "communalist" politics. If, says the BNP, Muslims can organise as a "community" to defend and further their "communal" interests, why can't the "indigenous" (read: "white") working class do the same? Indeed, under Nick Griffin, this is the successful strategy the BNP has pursued. The BNP, he argues, seeks to represent the interests of "indigenous" workers as against immigrants who, he claims, are being given preferential treatment by the "liberal Establishment". It's untrue, but it finds an echo amongst some sections of the working class, though not amongst those living and working in close proximity with immigrants who have learned to regard second and third generation "immigrants" as fellow workers.



In other words, two can play at "communalist" politics and the BNP will always be able to make more progress at this than the Far Left since they are appealing to a majority "community". It is possible to detect a certain jealousy amongst Leftists at the ability of the BNP to "mobilise" workers they would like to be able to mobilise themselves. Indeed, the rivalry between the BNP and the Far Left, which sometimes finds expressed in physical fighting, can be seen as a rivalry between two leadership groups – one calling itself a "vanguard", the other a "spearhead" – to lead workers. To which workers should adopt "a plague on both your houses" attitude.

As capitalism is the cause of the problems workers face these problems will continue as long as capitalism does. And as long as capitalism continues there will always be parties like the BNP which scapegoat other workers as the supposed cause of these problems. The answer is not to stop these parties by voting for other parties or by physically fighting or banning them. It is to organise on a world-wide class basis to end capitalism – which, necessarily, involves a rejection of nationalism.

ADAM BUICK

Xenophobia flourishes in Africa too, encouraged by state-building.

Who are the outsiders?



2008, a Mozambique immigrant burned alive in South Africa while the police look on

It is not only in the West that black people are subjected to racism and abusive languages by the host nation's population as "bloody foreigners", "parasites", "aliens", "refugees", etc, but also Africans living in other African countries are grimly accustomed to the same abusive language. Matters have sometimes been getting out of hand in recent years. There is an irony that this is happening when many countries in Africa are busy trying to organise a Union of African states to replace the useless organisation that the OAU has been.

A few years ago, tens of thousands of Eritreans and Ethiopians were expelled against their will when the two countries started war (May 1998 till June 2000). The Eritreans and Ethiopians who happened to be respectively living in each other's country had lived there for most of their lives, in some cases many of them didn't know their country of origin. The rulers of both sides accused each other, accurately, of human rights violation.

The reasons for these mass expulsions and violence are almost always the same in each country. "Patriotic" citizens are quick to assert, nationalistically, that the "outsiders" have come to take over their resources, their jobs and what have you. However, though the grievances of the masses may be related to economic factors, it is unreasonable to blame it on their fellow poor workers.

In order to ward off unrest various tactics are employed by governments. One of them is creating divisions among the poor workers by, for instance blaming foreigners and whipping up nationalistic feelings. In response to the official propaganda, the masses who are hungry and illiterate are taken in by the government policy.

Since anger is emotional and overpowers reason, the least provocation can result in misdirected violence, usually manifested in riots. The violence is usually turned loose on the "aliens". This is the real cause of xenophobia: the rich pitting the

poor against the poor.

In the past when Africa didn't have artificial boundaries such as there are today, wars and hatred were not as rife. Making up nations has taken a great deal of building. There is almost no nation-state that has not had its boundaries drawn in blood. America was built on the bodies of the native population. It is a process that continues today in Africa. The effort, though, has to be ongoing. States have required the use of an education

system, to standardise learning, spread a national history and a sense of shared culture.

Language became a factor in establishing state power, and thus it became a factor in determining a "nation". It is no coincidence that nationalism is accompanied by a mania for classifying, delineating and defining people into categories. These practical considerations were made explicit by the Polish Nationalist Pilsudski, who observed that "it is the state that makes the nation, not the nation the state".

In order to enforce the new system of property over the whole range of its influence, the ruling class needed the state, and its legitimising ideas of nationalism and the nation. Culture resides in sets of ideas, values and practices that set out a sense of precedent, self and future possibility.

Nationalism imposes the idea of the nation, complete with its inherent notions of territorial ownership and property, upon a

culture, on the very self-image of the people within that culture.

The idea of "the nation" functions as supreme good, beyond the physical and mechanical functionings of the state, to which any cause may appeal. It is a fantasy which can be used to cover up for problems and contradictions in the practice of the state's daily life. Its function is to legitimise both the state and class rule, and sustain a large quantity of support, through workers who identify with the ideas of nationhood and believe themselves to be the same as, and have the same interests as, their masters.

Workers of course, do not share a common interest with their masters. It does not follow that if the "national wealth" increases, or if trade increases, or even if profit increases, that higher wages will be gained by workers. It might appear that workers and employers share a common interest. In fact the interest of workers is conditioned by the interest of the employer, in exactly the same manner as hostages held by a kidnapper: unless the kidnapper/employer, demands are met, they will not allow the hostage/workers to have what they need to live.

In the powerful nations, history becomes a means of winning popular emotions to the cause of stability. An influential and well funded nostalgia industry has long been used in these nations to persuade workers that there is something great about being the nation's subject.

The valid definition of a modern nation is a geographical and political area in which goods and services are produced for the sale on the market with a view to profit and with the general class division of ruling and ruled. And the fact that the majority of population owns little but its ability to work is evidence the working class has no common interest with the minority ruling class.

MICHAEL GHEBRE

Land grabs - the new colonialism?

Capitalist states have started to acquire land outside their borders again.

At the start of capitalism land was grabbed on a large scale by Europeans in the Americas, Africa and Asia – wherever there were useful, desirable, valuable resources. Never mind the indigenous populations, they could be bought off cheaply or cowed into submission militarily. Accumulation was the name of the game, on behalf of powerful states and royal families.

Colonies sprang up worldwide explaining, among other things, the curious spread of different languages from relatively tiny nations to huge continents across oceans – English, Spanish, Portuguese and French – and ultimately to the use of English/American as the global business language.

It is now widely recognised that colonialism was responsible for subjugating local populations, imposing governmental and legal systems and generally exploiting and expropriating whatever natural abundance or rare animal, vegetable or mineral matter happened to be discovered. As time went on the exploitation was taken over by corporations and continues not only unabated but increasingly rapacious, bringing commodities to customers worldwide, degrading environments worldwide and impoverishing populations worldwide whilst enriching a tiny minority.

Now local populations are starting to fight back, to protest against their treatment as second-class or non-citizens, demanding land and water rights. Populations from China to South America and many places in between are in struggles against domestic or transnational mining corporations, against governments over population dispersal for big dams and Special Economic Zones, against food corporations and agribusiness trying to enforce small farmers' removal from their land in order to grow mono-crops for food and bio-fuels specifically for export.

Against this back-drop of "peasant/worker awakening" is the very latest emergence of a new form of colonialism – of land-grab – by "food insecure" governments fearing for the future of their own populations' food needs and also by food corporations and private investors looking for new ways to make profits in this current economic crisis. Since March 2008 "high-level officials" from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, India, South Korea, Libya and Egypt have been visiting countries with fertile

farmland including Uganda, Brazil, Cambodia, Sudan and Pakistan to strike deals which guarantee them sole use of farmland to grow crops for export back to their own lands. The reciprocity is foreign investment or oil or technology deals.

Another angle to this new colonialism – financial returns – is seeing all manner of players getting involved, seeking a new avenue for profit; investment houses, hedge funds, grain traders and others from the finance and food industries, all looking to take control of fertile soil with access to water supply in foreign lands. Whilst governments are largely the ones making the deals for food security it has been made plain that it is the private sector that will control the enterprises. Likewise, the hunt for financial returns is the business of private investors. In both cases

foreign private corporations will be taking control of farmland to produce food not for the local communities but for export back to the investor countries. Another form of accumulation by driving more local farmers from their land and stealing their livelihoods.

Here are three examples of deals struck so far (a full report is available from www.grain.org plus an annex in table form of over 100 cases of land-grab for offshore food production; online there is also a notebook of full-text news clippings being added to continuously to which people can contribute by emailing landgrab@grain.org).

First, China has sealed 30 agricultural cooperation deals which gives them access to "friendly country" farmland in exchange for Chinese technology, training and infrastructure development funds, in Kazakhstan, Queensland, Mozambique and the Philippines (to mention a few) and to which China flies in its own farmers, scientists and extension workers to grow rice, soya beans and maize as well as sugar cane, cassava and sorghum as bio-fuel crops.

Second, the Gulf States, short of water and productive soil but rich in oil and money, have been hard hit by the simultaneous rise in world food prices and fall in the US dollar to which (most) of their currencies are pegged. Their collective strategy has been to make deals particularly with other Islamic countries to which they will supply oil and capital in exchange for guarantees to farmland from which they can export the crops back home. Deals have been and continue to be made with Sudan, Pakistan and others in SE Asia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uganda, Ukraine, Brazil and others. From the millions of hectares of farmland already leased under contract harvests are expected to begin this year, particularly of rice and wheat.

Third, India's corporate agribusinesses and the government-owned State Trading Corporation are looking to produce oilseed crops, pulses and cotton abroad. One deal with Burma to enable India to have total control of



the agricultural process entails providing Burma with funds to upgrade its port infrastructure. They are also doing deals with Indonesia for palm oil plantations, talking to Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil about land for growing pulses and soya beans for export back home.

How will the indigenous populations react to this latest threat? This aggressive new policy of colonisation of land specifically for export crops and speculation is bound to increase pressure on local populations, more of whom will be struggling to feed their families working for wages, if so lucky, at a pittance level. Populations who don't need to be bought off cheaply this time because their own governments will willingly sell them out and who can easily be subdued militarily should the need arise, this time by the self-same government's police and armed forces.

JANET SURMAN

Then and Now: how we live and how we used to live

Part 1 – Then: A look back at the present day from a future time when socialism has been established.

It is strange to visualise now that the world up to and including the early years of this century was caught in a stranglehold of economic competition, national political boundaries and the overriding requirement to make a monetary profit out of the production and sale of property. Hardly anyone took seriously, or even much considered, the possibility of living as complete equals with collective ownership of the world's resources.

Visions of a future society portrayed in the science fiction novels and films of the time were almost invariably dystopian: civilisation might move out to the stars, but the prognostications were of ever increasing extremes of rich and poor, harsher governments and soaring crime rates. Fictional colonisations of new planets – giving humanity a fresh start free from the shackles of Earth – were almost invariably based on money, employment and profits.

The vast majority of people were limited in terms of what they could do by the amount of money they possessed, since the only way to obtain food, goods and services that they could not produce themselves was to exchange money for them. Those who had little or no money lived very poorly in a way we can scarcely imagine now, indeed many of them died through lack of life's necessities. A minority, on the other hand, those in control of the world's major resources, had more personal wealth than even the most imaginative of them knew what to do with.

Many people were reasonably well off by the standards of the time. They would "work for a living" for around 40 hours each



Tiny Tips

A collection of more than 3,000 inverted stamps has sold at auction in New York for more than \$5 million:

<http://tinyurl.com/mg4pmy>

One billion people throughout the world suffer from hunger, a figure which has increased by 100 million because of the global financial crisis, says the UN:

<http://tinyurl.com/mhr77q>

Cancer is a silent disease in Africa and in the developing world. World Health Organization (WHO) statistics shows that cancer kills more people in Africa than HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria combined. This is not a well-known fact, and a very disturbing one, especially since cancer diagnostics and treatment are of very poor standard in most African countries. Take for example Ghana - a country with more than 23 million people. They only have four oncologists to diagnose and treat cancer patients. WHO estimates that if we don't take act now, more than 11 million Africans may die of cancer in 2020:

<http://tinyurl.com/n6ayek>

One in four men in South Africa have admitted to rape and many confess to attacking more than one victim, according to a study that exposes the country's endemic culture of sexual violence

<http://tinyurl.com/mcvv28>

The Dalai Lama has encouraged Tibetans in exile to embrace the democratic system of electing a leader, saying it was essential to keep step with the larger world and to ensure the continuity of their government:

<http://tinyurl.com/l53l53>

Uganda has lost nearly a third of its forest cover since 1990 due to expanding farmlands, a rapidly growing human population and increased urbanisation, a government report said

<http://tinyurl.com/ma2798>

The Senate unanimously passed a resolution yesterday apologizing for slavery, making way for a joint congressional resolution and the latest attempt by the federal government to take responsibility for 2 1/2 centuries of slavery

<http://tinyurl.com/llnxgp>

Nearly twice as many US army soldiers today are either alcoholic or engage in damaging behaviour such as binge drinking than six years ago, and experts blame the rise on repeated tours in war zones:

<http://tinyurl.com/lv79mx>

President Hugo Chavez is standing by his man in the Middle East, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, even as hundreds of thousands of ordinary Iranians took to the streets Wednesday for the fifth straight day to protest his claim to a landslide reelection

<http://tinyurl.com/n84yz4>

Zimbabwe is suffering "persistent and serious" human rights violations despite the formation of a unity government four months ago, Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khansaid

<http://tinyurl.com/mrmm9k>

week, and as long as they were seen to be contributing to their employer's wealth, they were paid a monthly salary with which to pay for the necessities of life – food, heating and shelter – for themselves and their immediate families. Many months they might have a small surplus to save for future use or spend during holidays from employment or on 'luxury' items.

Employers, the owners of capital, were ever seeking new ways of increasing their profits and attempting to draw their workers into their world, to get them to see things from their side, to be inventive in creating ways of packaging new products, or re-packaging old products, to make them appear ever more attractive. Workers were divided into a hierarchy, with the better paid ones, generally more imbued with the "company ethos" instilled into them by the owners, assuming authority over those lower down in the pecking order.

The vast majority of workers complied with their employer's wishes through a need to carry on earning money. Employees at all levels were constantly encouraged to "think outside the box" in their efforts to please their employers; in reality worker and employer alike were unable to see the walls of the huge box that contained them all.

Money permeated the whole of life and almost nothing was exempt from the need to generate it, earn it or spend it. And because the owners of the world's resources as a group controlled the channels of communication, the message expressed or implied to the population at large was that this state of affairs was necessary and unchangeable and that their leaders knew what was best for them.

Largely because of such propaganda, not all workers saw themselves as exploited or even hard done by. People were, for the most part, simply grateful to be among those whose skills and abilities were seen as necessary and hence saleable. And many, such as doctors, teachers and care workers, performed useful roles despite the often longer than average, stressful hours they had to work and, in some cases, the paltry amounts of money they received in return.

But others were not so fortunate. Millions worldwide were unable to secure or maintain the employment necessary to provide them with the money to buy life's necessities. Many people were left entirely to their own meagre resources. Some were forced to work almost the whole day long to secure the price of a meal and a bed, while still others had no recourse but to beg. Many people understandably resorted to the peddlers of alcohol, drugs and religion, to the relative comfort

of an anaesthetised life on Earth or the vacuous promise of a second life free of care after death.

As is no doubt evident, money was a form of rationing – the less you had, the less access you had to the best quality food and goods. This resulted in manufacturers producing a whole range of goods at varying qualities and hence varying prices, to ensure they catered for, and therefore profited from, the needy as well as the better off. And because personal possessions were

hard-gained, people tended to be inordinately proud of them and jealous of others who had more.

People generally lived in a family unit typically comprising a married couple and up to three or four children. This restricted economic unit generally served its purpose in ensuring that children were adequately looked after until they in turn were ready to do service to an employer; if it broke down, however, say by the married couple splitting up or one of them dying, this could place an intolerable burden on the one parent left supporting the children, usually with very little outside help. There was very little left of the extended supportive family or community such as had existed even in earlier capitalist times. And if both parents died or were incapacitated, alternative care provisions for the children were rudimentary at best.

Dependence on money, and the stress caused through lack of it, meant that arguments and outbreaks of violence were frequent – "we can't afford it" or "where is the money going to come from?" were often heard among the members of the cocooned family units, even among the more comfortably off. Buyer and seller, employer and employee, even husband and wife, inevitably regarded one another as sources of financial or material gain, and hence, in part, as one another's possessions.

Sections of the working population were constantly played off and made to compete against one another, either deliberately or passively, on the basis of such irrelevant considerations as skin colour, nationality or even gender, in an attempt to keep them weak and divided. And the need for capitalist enterprises to compete against one another in their quest for profits inevitably led to wider conflicts, resulting time and again in failed businesses with the resultant loss of livelihoods and, in extreme cases, in bloody and ruthless wars.

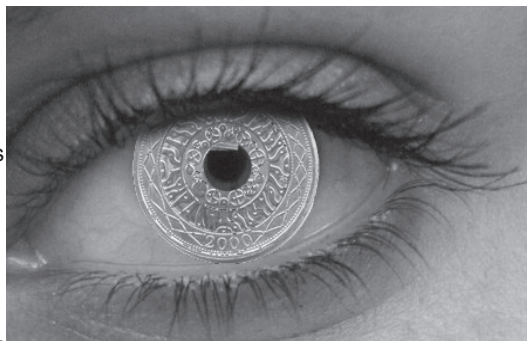
Factories and commercial centres tended to be concentrated in large urban areas, to and from which workers would have to travel on a daily basis in crowded trains or on congested roads. Despite the limited adoption of variable working hours, peak travel times were unpleasant if not nightmarish.

It was also evident that capitalist society was incapable of addressing the problems besetting the environment which came to the fore in this period. As global warming increased, caused at least in part by man-made pollutants from wasteful, inefficient technology, with increasingly erratic climate systems resulting in the disappearance of much wildlife and an increase in the number of floods and fires, however well-intentioned the proponents of corrective action, remedies were always subject to the constraints of what could be done profitably and were therefore never adequately effected, to the extent that some of the damage to the environment nearly became irreversible.

To think of the world as it was only so few decades ago has been at best sobering and at worst traumatic; the conclusion I reach is that this period of man's history is best left where it is... consigned to the history books or, better still, to the memory.

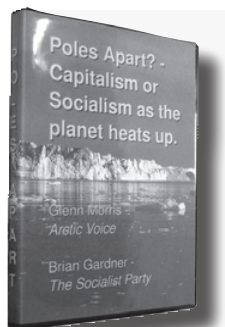
Next month Part 2: a look back from a future at the changeover to socialism.

ROD SHAW



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MORE'S UTOPIA AND THE MEANING OF SOCIALISM

The word *utopia*, together with its derivatives *utopian* and *utopianism*, is a familiar part of our political vocabulary. It originated as the title of a work by the Tudor lawyer, statesman and writer Thomas More, first published in Latin in 1516 as a traveller's description of a remote island. *Utopia* is a pun: it can be read either as *ou-topos*, Greek for 'no place', or as *eu-topos*, 'good place' – that is, a good place (society) that exists in the imagination.

More invented the word, but the thing it represents is much older. Plato in his *Republic* discussed the nature of the ideal city state. Medieval serfs took solace in the imaginary ease and plenty of the Land of Cockaigne. More's utopia, however, is the first to embody a response to capitalist social relations, which in the early 16th century were just emerging in England and the Low Countries (in agriculture and textiles). As the first *modern* utopia, it has a special place in the emergence of modern socialist thought.

Contents of More's *Utopia*

The work consists of two 'books'. Book I is More's account of how he came to hear of Utopia. Book II describes the Utopians' way of life – their towns and farms, government, economy, travel, slaves, marriages, military discipline, religions.

More presents his story as true fact. Henry VIII sends him to Flanders as his ambassador to settle a dispute with Spain – and we know that this is true (it was in 1515; the dispute concerned the wool trade). During a break in the negotiations he meets his young friend Peter Giles, who introduces him to an explorer, Raphael Hythloday, just back from a long voyage. There follows a long conversation between More, Giles and Hythloday.

Giles and More urge Hythloday to put the vast

WAS NOWHERE SOME-WHERE?

knowledge acquired on his travels to use by entering the service of a king. Hythloday refuses, arguing that no courtier dare speak his mind or advocate wise and just policies. This exchange is thought to reflect More's misgivings about his own career in royal service.

The conversation then turns to the situation in England. They discuss the enclosure (now we call it privatisation) of common land to graze sheep, the consequent pauperisation and uprooting of the peasantry ("your sheep devour men"), the futile cruelty of hanging wretches who steal to survive, and other social ills.

This leads them to the question of remedies.

Hythloday declares that the injustice, conflict and waste inherent in the power of money can be overcome only by doing away with private property. More objects that this would remove the incentive to work. (Sounds familiar?) Hythloday replies that More would think otherwise had he been with him in Utopia.

Utopia is, indeed, a society without private property. Households contribute to and draw freely on common stocks of goods. Money is used only in dealings with foreign countries, while gold and jewels are regarded as baubles for children and "fools" (i.e., the mentally retarded). In these respects Utopia resembles socialism as we conceive of it.

In other respects, however, it does not. Decision-making procedures are only partly democratic. A hierarchy of "magistrates" enforces draconian regulations: travel, for instance, requires official permission. The main penalty for serious transgressions is enslavement – not to individuals, of course, but to the community. Thus, there is a class of slaves who do not participate in common ownership but are themselves owned. Utopia is not a classless society.

Was More joking?

Almost all critics treat More's factual presentation as a mere literary device. They do not believe that he met an explorer while in Flanders or that he was influenced in his description of Utopia by

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case

information about real places. This is not to say that they attribute everything solely to More's fertile imagination. They often draw connections between his ideas and the thought of Greco-Roman antiquity. In the foreword to an edition of *Utopia* published in 1893, William Morris even calls Utopia 'an idealised ancient society'. More was one of the foremost classical scholars of his day, so it is a plausible view.

Yet More always maintained, even in private correspondence, that *Utopia* was based on fact. Was he joking? He liked a good joke.

Two researchers take More at his word. It is quite possible, they argue, that he did meet an explorer who had encountered or heard about a pre-Columbian society in the Americas that served More as a prototype for Utopia. Arthur E. Morgan, an engineer who was chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the 1930s, takes the Inca Empire as the prototype (*Nowhere was Somewhere: How History Makes Utopias and How Utopias Make History*, University of North Carolina Press 1946), while the anthropologist Lorainne Stobart identifies the Utopians with the Maya of the Yucatan Peninsula in present-day Mexico (*Utopia: Fact or Fiction? The Evidence from the Americas*, Alan Sutton 1992).

They argue that it is not valid to argue that Hythloday cannot represent a real person because Europeans knew nothing of the Maya or Incas at the time when More was writing *Utopia* (1515–16). This is true only if we accept the conventional chronology that conflates discovery with the military expeditions of the Spanish conquistadors (Cortes first landed in Yucatan in 1517; Pizarro entered Inca territory in 1526). But Morgan and Stobart refer to old maps and documents indicating that Portuguese explorers reached the eastern shores of Central and South America as early as the 14th century (Hythloday is Portuguese), while English sailors were trading with the new lands by the 1470s. Whether any of these early travellers got as far as Peru is less certain, though some may have obtained indirect information about the Incas.

How closely does More's Utopia resemble the Maya and Inca civilizations? Morgan and Stobart detail numerous similarities in political and economic organization, dress, social customs, city layout, family life, science and art, and so on – even down to such practices as the erection of memorial pillars and ceremonial wearing of quetzal feathers. The Maya and the Incas, like the Utopians, used money only in foreign trade and had common stores from which officials distributed produce (except that, in contrast to Utopia, it was rationed). It is extremely unlikely that so many close parallels should arise purely by chance.

But there are also important differences. The most telling criticism made against these authors is that they obscure a wide gap in social structure between the aristocratic autocracies of the Maya and the Incas and the basically democratic governance of More's Utopia (see George Logan's review of Stobart in *Moreana*, June 1994).

It is therefore doubtful whether *Utopia* is a direct

representation of any specific pre-Columbian society. Nevertheless, More's account does probably reflect the influence of knowledge of such societies that he had somehow acquired, possibly from a Portuguese explorer he met in Flanders.

A bureaucratic mode of production

This conclusion has implications for our understanding of the development of socialist ideas. For it means that a seminal work of modern socialist thought bears the imprint of archaic societies that though not based on private property were far removed from the classless democracy of genuine socialism.

The Maya and Inca social systems are strikingly 'pure' examples of what Marx called the 'Asiatic mode of production'. In this mode, a royal bureaucracy extracts and redistributes surplus from pre-existing peasant communes and directs public works. The monarch is considered the owner of land and resources. The word 'Asiatic' does not, of course, fit the New World context (Marx had mainly India in mind). Karl Wittfogel, stressing

the centrality of water management, coined the term 'hydraulic mode of production'. Or we might call it the pre-industrial bureaucratic mode of production.

Louis Baudin paints a vivid picture of what it was like to live under this system in his *Daily Life in Peru under the Last Incas* (Macmillan, 1961). It was a hard

life for the common people, but their basic necessities were

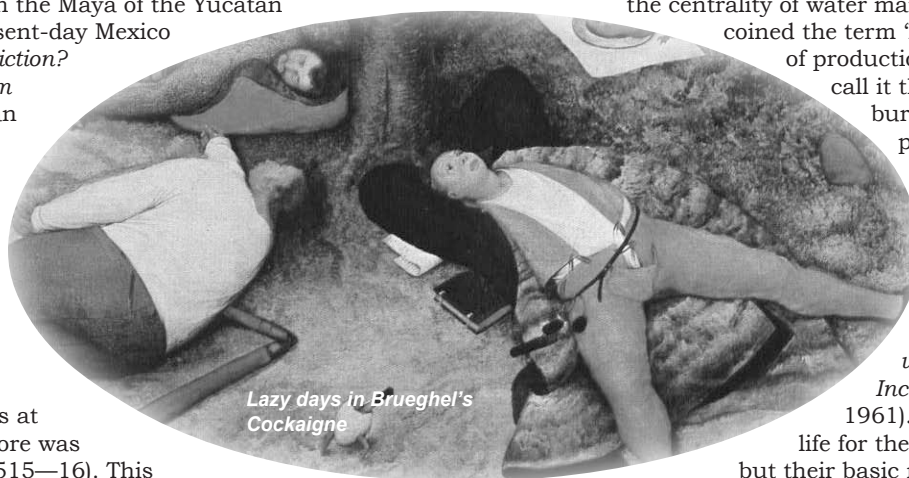
supplied: a small dwelling, two woollen garments each when they marry, a patch of land, relief in the event of local famine. They were more fortunate in this regard than poor people were in More's England – or than they themselves would be after the Spanish conquest. But they were victims of class exploitation nonetheless.

It is understandable that the Incas and the Maya should have appealed to early European critics of capitalism. Theirs, however, was not the only alternative model that the pre-Columbian Americas offered to the reign of private property. The New World was also home to the much more egalitarian 'primitive communism' of peoples like the Iroquois who so fascinated the 19th-century anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan and through him Engels and Marx, influencing their conception of 'advanced communism'.

An upright and honest official

More's utopia is a sort of compromise between the democratic and authoritarian-bureaucratic conceptions of communal life. He omits important information that would help us clarify the nature of the society that he is portraying. In particular, how are the higher officials appointed or elected? (We know that lower-level officials are elected.) Do they have material privileges? Does Utopia have an aristocracy of any kind?

I interpret this ambiguity in light of More's general attitude toward the lower classes. He felt genuine compassion for the suffering of the poor. This is clear not only from the sentiments he expresses through his *alter ego* Hythloday, but also from his reputation as an



Lazy days in Bruegel's Cockaigne

upright and honest judge and official. He did not take bribes from the rich and he patronised the poor. By the standards of his day and age, he was open-minded and tolerant. He belonged to the same social type as that other upright and honest official, his near-contemporary in Ming China, Hai Rui.

But More, like Hai Rui, was no rebel. He was a "good servant" of God and king, a member of the ruling class with a strong belief in order and hierarchy. His ideal was not the fully democratic self-administration of society, which he could hardly imagine, but rather paternalistic "good government" by upright and honest officials like himself.

In conclusion

So what shall we make of More's *Utopia*? It is, to be sure, an eloquent critique of the cruelty and perversity of capitalism, all the more remarkable for having been written at a time when that system had scarcely bared its fangs. However, More – although he envisages the abolition of money – does not provide a picture of what we now mean by socialism. But then that could hardly have been expected of him.

STEFAN

Meetings

LONDON

Sunday 12 July at 6.00pm

"Here come the Robots?"

Speaker: Bill Martin

Sunday 26 July at 6.00pm

"What is real democracy; how do we get it?"

Speaker - Vincent Otter

Saturday 25 July 7.30pm

Public Debate

SHOULD CAPITALISM HAVE A FUTURE?

Yes: Magnus Nielsen (UKIP)

No: Gwynn Thomas (Socialist Party)

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4
(nearest tube: Clapham North)

GLASGOW

Wednesday 15 July, 8.30pm

"Capital Accumulation"

Speaker: Peter Hendrie

Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road

MANCHESTER

Monday 27 July, 8.30 pm

"Revolution in a Box"

Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

Lothians Discussion Group (under the auspices of the Socialist Party's Edinburgh Branch)

Venue: ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh

Every 4th Wednesday of the Month

Time: 7.30pm-9.00pm

Contact:

Fraser Anderson: Fraser@prolerat.org

Jimmy Moir: jimmy@prolerat.org

EAST ANGLIA

Saturday 11 July 12-4pm

Branch Meeting

Reindeer Pub, 10 Dereham Rd, Norwich



Clutching at green shoots

The textbooks may say that the banking system can create loans worth ten times more than an initial deposit in any bank in the system, and currency cranks may misrepresent this to mean that an individual bank can create money to lend out of thin air, but practising bankers and financial journalists know better.

A recent article in the *Investors Chronicle* (22-28 May), discussing the difference between banks in Asia and banks in Britain and America, gave the views of an investment manager, Mike Kerley:

"Consider the banks in the US and the UK," says Mr Kerley. "They lend out far more than their deposit base and rely on credit markets to fund this, which has been shown to be ill-advised, costly and ultimately catastrophic." Although the Australian market is closely aligned with the UK banking model, elsewhere in Asia the deposit base more than covers lending, so there are no serious liquidity issues. "Banks are the opportunity in Asia. Asian loans to deposit ratios are 80 per cent," he says. "Asian banks do what banks should do and make money on margins."

This is a typical confirmation that banks make their core profit out of borrowing money at one rate of interest and re-lending it at another, higher rate. No bank can lend money it doesn't have so they have to get this from somewhere. In the past all banks used to get the money to re-lend, as banks in Asia still do, from what had been deposited with them. In recent years, however, banks in Britain and America, started to borrow money to re-lend from the money market.

Banks in Britain and America still make their profits (or suffer losses) out of the margin between the rate of interest at which they borrow and the rate at which they lend. The difference is their reliance more on borrowing money from the money market than from depositors (a deposit is essentially a loan to a bank). The money market is a much more volatile source of funds than deposits, as American and British banks eventually found to their cost.

When the crisis began interest rates on the money market went up, so squeezing the margin between the two rates of interest, in some cases wiping it out or even making it negative. Hence the banking crisis. Things seem to have settled down a bit at the moment.

Not that the banking crisis was going to last for ever. Nor will the economic crisis. However, before a recovery can begin stocks must first be cleared, though this won't be enough in itself. There are signs that this may have started, but is being optimistically seen by some economic commentators as a sign that the depression is over. "Recession is over, says think-tank as it reports growth in April and May", headlined the *Times* (11 June) reporting the opinion of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

The *Times*'s own Business Editor, David Wighton, was more cautious:

"If the upturn we are seeing now is in large part because of restocking, there will be a spike in orders which will inevitably fall back again".

There is still some way to go before economic conditions will be ripe for a recovery to really begin. Unprofitable firms must be eliminated, their capital destroyed or devalued, and real wages must fall, so as to restore the rate of profit. That means more company failures and more unemployment. In short, more misery in a world that could provide plenty for all if it weren't for capitalism.

No Chief, No God

Don't Sleep, There are Snakes. By Daniel Everett. Profile £15.



In 1977 Dan Everett travelled with his wife and their three young children to the midst of the Amazon jungle. They were going to live among the Pirahã people, where Everett was to learn their language in order

to translate the new testament into it and so convert them to christianity (he was working for a missionary organisation). He learnt the language but failed to convert any of the Pirahã; rather, they and their culture had a profound influence on his own beliefs, about language, religion and how to live.

The Pirahã, who now number less than four hundred, are typical of pre-state societies. They depend on hunting, foraging and fishing, and a family can acquire enough food for a week by working at most twenty hours each (including the children), though fishing and so on are fun and don't really count as work. They do not plan for the future, and do not preserve food. They have few possessions but no concept of poverty. There is a strong sense of community and of mutual responsibility: an elderly disabled man who could not fend for himself was given food as a matter of course. There are no chiefs, and ostracism and exclusion from food-sharing are the main means of 'coercion' used to control each other's behaviour.

Spirit 'voices' can also influence the Pirahãs' conduct, but they claim to see these spirits regularly and have no concept of a creator god. Their lives are very much in the here and now, and what they talk about is limited to what the speaker or someone they know has witnessed. Consequently, they were completely unreceptive to Everett's religious message, based as it was on books produced by people he had never met. He translated Mark's gospel into the Pirahã language, but they were only interested in hearing about the beheading of John the Baptist!

This led Everett to question his own faith in unseen things, and to a realisation that it was perfectly possible to be contented without believing in sin, hell and heaven.

He kept his new-found atheism a secret for many years, and when he eventually came clean it resulted in the break-up of his family.

Everett describes the Pirahã as happy, patient and kind, certainly happier than any religious people he has encountered. It is important not to romanticise them and their way of life: they live in a dirty and dangerous environment, suffer high infant mortality and can be astonishingly violent to outsiders. But the Pirahãs "show no evidence of depression, chronic fatigue, extreme anxiety, panic attacks, or other psychological ailments common in many industrialized societies."

This book shows clearly how life under capitalism is just one means of human organisation, not the consequence of 'human nature', and that life without money and mortgages and god has plenty of attractions.

PB

Globalization

Marxian Economics and Globalization. By Binay Sarkar and Adam Buick, Avenel Press, Calcutta, 2009. ISBN 81-902529-5-X

Is globalization just another word for capitalism? The short answer is yes. A longer answer is provided in this invaluable book written by two socialists. Using Marxian economics as their explanatory framework, there are chapters on 'Capitalism as a world system', 'What is political economy?', 'The basic categories of Marxian economics', 'The marginal revolution in economics against the labour theory of value', 'The cyclical nature of capitalist production', 'The era of permanent inflation', 'The Bolsheviks and the abolition of money', 'Anti-globalization or anti-capitalism?', 'Why we need global change'. The book is dedicated to "The Working Class of the World".

Today we live in a world completely dominated by capitalist production, where wealth is produced for sale on a market with a view to profit. Writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, Marx's analysis of capitalism had identified it as an inherently globalizing system. As the *Communist Manifesto* put it, "the cheap price of commodities ... compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production". The authors look at the globalization of capitalism since his day, as manifested in the ever-widening world division of

labour, world wars and rivalry for sources of raw materials, markets and investment outlets, the rise of the multinational corporation and the emergence of global financial markets. They discuss the opposition to these developments and argue that anti-imperialism and anti-globalization are not the same as anti-capitalism, as this has to be a movement aimed at a world socialist society where the resources of the globe have become the common heritage of its entire people.

There are a few quibbles. State capitalism is said to be the "most regressive, dehumanizing and degenerating" form of capitalism (page 55). But this is arguably a judgement on which socialists do not need to take sides; we are opposed to capitalism whatever form it takes. We are told that under state capitalism, "capital remains private property of the state functionaries collectively" (page 56). But this could suggest that state functionaries had a legal claim on capital, which was generally not the case, though they did exercise possession as a class through their control of political power. It is claimed that John Stuart Mill was an "opponent of Karl Marx" (page 90). But though Marx was well acquainted with the writings of Mill, there is no evidence that Mill knew of Marx's existence. But these are quibbles. Hopefully a future edition will have an index, so enabling the reader to easily track down the many fascinating ideas and quotes to be found in this important book.

LEW

Revolutions

Endnotes #1 – Preliminary Materials For A Balance Sheet Of The Twentieth Century. 216 pages. Available from Endnotes, 12 London Road, Brighton, BN1 4JA. £10

The opening issue of this new journal is based around a dialogue between contemporary French ultra-left groups *Troploin* (Gilles Dauvé & Karl Nesic) and *Théorie Communiste* (who remain anonymous). Of the contributors Dauvé is probably most well known to English speakers for his tracts written under the pseudonym 'Jean Barrot' – *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement, Critique of the Situationist International and Fascism / Anti-fascism*.

As Endnotes state in their introduction "...we have no wish to encourage an interest in history per se. [...] We hope [...] to undermine the

illusion that this is somehow “our” past, something to be protected or preserved. [...] We would go so far as to say that with the exception of the recognition of the historical break that separates us from them, that we have nothing to learn from the failures of past revolutions — no need to replay them to discover their “errors” or distil their “truths” — for it would in any case be impossible to repeat them.”

Both groups, and presumably Endnotes, are tied to the concept of “Communisation” — communism is not something that happens after the revolution, it is the “immediate production of communism; the self-abolition of the proletariat through its abolition of capital and the state.” Notions of both a “transitional society” and “workers self-management” are rejected. Capitalism is a system of production, value accumulation can as easily be managed by workers as by private capitalists or state bureaucrats.

The structure of the journal — each chapter is a critique of the one preceding it — makes for a stimulating and engaging read. A wide range of concepts and historical events are covered and subject to lively criticism. From the Paris Commune to Argentina 2002 via the Russian and German revolutions, Italian “Red Years”, the Spanish tragedy, Paris 68 and the Italian “Hot Autumn” we are taken on a radical train journey of revolution and counter-revolution, though the spirit isn’t one of nostalgic reminiscence but firmly rooted in the possibilities of the present moment.

Whilst the politics of both Troploin and Théorie Communiste don’t converge with the Socialist Party on all counts there is certainly plenty of food for thought on offer here and a good opportunity to become acquainted with a not overly well known current of contemporary European thought.

DJP



Cartoon Karl

Taro Aso, the current Prime Minister of Japan, is widely known to be a fan of “manga”. His love of comic books seems

quite genuine (although it may be related to his notorious inability to read even some of the more basic

Japanese *kanji* characters). Setting aside whatever personal reasons he may have, however, it is clear that Aso loves manga for practical political reasons as well, as he is convinced that it can contribute to an expansion in Japan’s “soft power.” Aso has clearly stated a hope that manga will assist Japanese diplomacy by raising what he calls the “brand image” of Japan, particularly in

those Asian countries where people’s memories have been branded by the experience of Japanese colonial rule.

The problem for Aso is that not every manga published today conforms to the hollow “cool Japan” marketing image that he is peddling. Around two years ago, for instance, one top-selling manga was a version of a 1920s “proletarian novel” written by the Communist author Takiji Kobayashi, which depicted the harsh life of workers at the time and exposed nationalistic ideology. And now, to Aso’s dismay I suspect, there is also a *manga* version of Marx’s *Capital* available in Japan.

This new manga, published by East Press last December, comes in two pocket-size volumes. Volume one presents a fictional tale of a young man named Robin, who is first seen in the marketplace selling cheese that his father produces on his small farm. Against the wishes of his father, who is a sort of anti-capitalist curmudgeon, Robin accepts the financial backing of a smooth venture capitalist named Daniel (who resembles a young Mick Jagger) to go into the cheese business on a large scale.

The rest of the story depicts how Robin, once he has become a capitalist, must follow the logic of capital, ruthlessly seeking to raise productivity, even it means squeezing his workers dry; and how the workers begin to rebel against their servile position as wage slaves. Instead of an overly simplistic tale of heroes and villains, the story makes it quite clear that the characters are forced to act in accordance with the nature of the capitalist system. However sympathetic Robin might be as an individual, and however pure his (initial) intentions, he ends up acting as a capitalist must act to remain a capitalist.



The second volume concentrates more on the actual content of *Capital*, particularly the first few chapters where the labour theory of value and the all-important concept of surplus-value are presented; and Marx and Engels appear to explain those and other points. At the same time, the example of Robin’s cheese factory is again referred to as a way to clarify how capitalists go about trying to squeeze out more surplus-value as a means of increasing their

own profits and driving competitors out of business. On the first page of this second volume, where the cast of characters is introduced, it is clearly stated that, “Within capitalist society lurks an insatiable monster” — and the reader soon discovers that this monster is the insane pursuit of profit that drives capitalism forward.

One might quibble with certain aspects of the books, including what seems to be an idealization of small-scale producers (like Robin’s father), but on the whole both succeed in clarifying the most-important aspects of the capitalist system in a vivid way that even young readers can understand.

Currently the manga is only available in Japanese; but the publication generated a number of newspaper reports in the UK and elsewhere, and there is some possibility that it will eventually be translated into English.

MS

New Pamphlet An Inconvenient Question: Socialism and the Environment



see order form on page 9 for details

Party News

The Socialist Party stood a list in the London Region in last month's election to the European Parliament, so giving over 5 million electors the choice between capitalism and socialism (more than in a number of EU countries, Ireland for instance). In the event only about a third, or 1.7 million, voted. Of them 4050 were for the Socialist list. There were 18 other lists or individual candidates.

Besides the two meetings we ourselves organised, we spoke at 7 meetings organised by others and were granted the whole of 30 seconds air-time on BBC regional TV and radio (you have to contest all regions to get a Party Political Broadcast, and then you have to pay for it to be produced). 240,000 leaflets were delivered free by

the post office to 4 areas (parliamentary constituencies) we selected; a further 28,000 were distributed by members. Statistics showed that there were over 20,000 looks at the on-line version of our leaflets on our website at www.worldsocialism.org/spgb.

Outside London we ran a write-in for socialism campaign, with a further 12,000 leaflets being distributed. A token number of leaflets were distributed, in the language of the country, by members and sympathisers in Italy, Spain and France. The leaflet was also available on our website in German, Dutch, Swedish, Polish, Turkish and Bengali.

The Socialist Party will be contesting Vauxhall in the coming general election, which must take place before next May, and also two wards in Lambeth in the London borough elections next May.

Socialist Standard

Bound volumes (2005-2007) for £25 plus postage, each, order from HO, cheques payable to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain"

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Race & Violence



With the recent murder of a coloured man in Notting Hill, race-prejudice has once more become a subject of public interest. It is not possible to say at this stage whether or not Kelso Cochrane died as a result of racial hatred.

What can be said is that passions, hatred and sympathies have been aroused. A large crowd of mourners, both white and black, followed Cochrane's coffin through the streets. Many organisations have had their say about Notting-Hill; some of them, such as the Union Movement, propagating racial discrimination. There is no doubt that the Union Movement is anti-coloured, and rabidly so. It considers that this country should be reserved for Englishmen. This is a "one way only" policy however. Not so many years ago a main plank in Mosley's platform was the intensive economic

development of British Africa; for the benefit of the British, of course. "Keep out the coloureds" does not mean keeping the Pinks out of South Africa, Kenya or Nyasaland. The left-wing too, have been having their little stir. They, poor souls, are in a bit of a quandary, for the Labour Government's record does not look particularly attractive. The imprisonment of Nkrumah and the banishment of Seretse Khama must make the collection of coloured people's votes a rather difficult matter. There are, too, plenty of advocates in the Labour Party for the policy of restricting or excluding immigrants. The supporters of such views, to be logical, should exclude or restrict the movement of anybody going anywhere to look for jobs.

(from front page article by F.R. Ivimey, *Socialist Standard*, July 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be brought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Hogg's Ditch

What with all the talk about reforming Parliament, antagonising MPs by restricting their ravenous appetite for expenses, it may not be long for the famous green benches to be swept clean of those venerable persons wallowing in titles like the Right Honourable Douglas Hogg, Old Etonian, Third Viscount Hailsham, Privy Councillor, Barrister at Law, Queen's Counsel, Member of Parliament (for the present) for Sleaford and North Hykeham, brother of a High Court Judge, husband of a baroness and owner of Kettlethorpe Hall, a stately home in Lincolnshire. With a moat - about the only exterior relic of the original 13th Century house. It is some time now since Hogg was at his most active politically; he was Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food from July 1995 until Labour's victory in 1997 since when he has stayed contentedly inconspicuous.

Whistle Blower

But that was before the *Daily Telegraph*, digging into the secrets of the MP's claims as revealed by that whistle blower's expensive aids to research, turned the spotlight away from the drab fiddlers on the Labour benches and onto the gloating Conservative manipulators opposite. This made sickeningly fascinating reading, for among the claims for money for a chandelier and a swimming pool was one for clearing the moat at Hogg's home. The new Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy marked the occasion at a Manchester school: "What did he do with the trust of your vote?/Hired a flunky to flush out the moat". A nation-wide rush to consult architectural reference books revealed that a moat is water surrounding somewhere - a castle, a fortified house - important enough to need such a defence against an invading enemy or perhaps, in some cases, irate deprived Lincolnshire peasantry. A moat is expected to be, in scale with the place it defends, impressively large - wide and deep (Alan Clark, the late alcoholic and disreputable MP who owned the magnificent Saltwood Castle in Kent, was in the habit of taking a swim in the moat there) with a drawbridge to filter out unwanted visitors. The photographs of Hogg's moat, however, showed it to be not much more than an above average sized ditch - although one which obviously needs regular, expensive cleaning paid for through parliamentary allowances. David Cameron was infuriated at the revival of the stereotypical image of the greedy Tory toff which he has worked so hard to eradicate.

Lord Chancellor

As a lawyer Hogg is accustomed to defending the indefensible and his response to the *Daily Telegraph's* exposure was desperately evasive: "That is not correct. It was in a letter which explained what expenses we had incurred, it wasn't an expenses schedule...All the claims I made were agreed in advance". Reinforcing this

attempt to pass the blame for his behaviour elsewhere he conceded, when asked about his constituents' anger at his claim for the moat, "It is true that the system is clearly flawed". Hogg's ancestors would have been proud of his lawyerly skills here; although he has remained a humble QC both his father and grandfather rose to the heights of Lord Chancellor, head of the country's judges and in the House of Lords sitting, by ancient custom, on a large cushion called the Woolsack from where the noble lords were kept under control, speaking to the point and avoiding all challenge to the presumptions of property society. However humble, Hogg is a rich man, with shareholdings and property investments which protect him from the kind of penury familiar to some of his infuriated constituents.

BSE And CJD

Unlike his eminent forefathers Hogg did not make a name for himself in government. At his peak, in charge of Agriculture Fisheries and Food he was marked down as The Minister Without A Friend. Rivals on the lower reaches of the Greasy Pole happily fed the media with snide gossip about him, typically that he had been given the job when the first choice had turned it down because it was politically suicidal. When the BSE crisis broke

in 1996 and the first cases of the human variant CJD were reported Hogg was cruelly exposed as lacking the sleight of word so essential to survival. Alan Clark, who could always be relied on to kick someone when they are down, recorded meeting "little Douglas Hogg" in 1983, when he was a Junior Whip: "I can't decide whether he is likeable or not. (But I should say that many do not have this difficulty.) I don't mind people being rude, provided that they are not uncouth with it. But he is colossally self-satisfied. Or is it a chip?...Well, I said 'how are you keeping all the new boys in order?'...By offering them your job'.



Sacked

Well very soon someone will be offered Hogg's job. "I have decided" he said on 18 May "that now is the time to tell the Sleaford and North Hykeham Association that I will not be standing at the next election". It was a polite way of saying that he had been sacked for failing to fit in with Cameron's efforts to recast the Tory image into a youthful, classless, open party who can, by a process so far unattainable to all others, transform capitalism into a humane society. But euphemisms are essential to a politician's vocabulary; over the expenses scandal they have been extensively used to muddy the reality that while the amounts of money involved in the Lord's and the MP's wretched scams are mind-boggling to so many workers struggling to survive they are trivial compared to the cost, in every sense, of the damage capitalism does to the world and its people.

IVAN

Voice from the Back

Greens And Green Backs

It is fashionable for every capitalist politician to say that they are "green" – it is a good vote-

catcher, but the realities of capitalism are the production of more and more profits. So when it comes to the crunch, profit-making is going to be a bigger priority than the environment. "US Energy Secretary Steven Chu says the US will not be able to cut greenhouse emissions as much as it should due to domestic political opposition. Prof Chu told *BBC News* he feared the world might be heading towards a tipping point on climate change. This meant the US had to cut emissions urgently – even if compromises were needed to get new laws approved. ... President Barack Obama says he wants cuts in greenhouse gases but has left it to Congress to make the political running. The House of Representatives is debating a climate and energy bill but even if it passes it may be rejected by senators, many of whom are funded by the energy industry." (*BBC News*, 21 May) Politicians are deeply concerned about "green" issues - the issue of green-back dollars.

Improving Capitalism?

Socialism is a good idea, but rather than dream of a future society without social problems we should get on with the practical business of improving capitalism gradually with a series of reforms of the system. That is the claim of many opponents of world socialism, but what has 40 years of reform and 40 years of charity done to aid the problem of

world hunger? "A UN report says hunger in South Asia has reached its highest level in 40 years because of food and fuel price rises and the global economic downturn. The report by the UN children's fund, Unicef, says that 100 million more people in the region are going hungry compared with two years ago. It names the worst affected areas as Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The report says South Asia's governments need to urgently increase social spending to meet the challenge. It says that climate change and urbanisation also need tackling. According to the World Bank, three quarters of the population in South Asia - almost 1.2 billion people - live on less than \$2 (£1.2) a day. And more than 400m people in the region are now chronically hungry." (*BBC News*, 2 June) Who are the dreamers? Socialists who wish to abolish the system that produces world hunger or "practical" people with their reform programmes and charity drives that have succeeded in only making the problem worse over the last 40 years.

A Shameful Waste

This glaring problem of world hunger is happening in a society where capitalist governments throughout the world are spending immense amounts of human labour and natural resources in producing means to destroy human lives. "China spent \$84.9 billion (£53 billion) on its military last year, second only to the United States, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Its report said that France moved into third place in spending with Britain fourth. Military spending worldwide rose by 4 per cent to \$1.46 trillion, the report said." (*Times*, 9 June) Only the new society of world socialism will abolish this madness. Think what that \$1.46 trillion represents in human labour and natural resources and think what it could achieve in abolishing world

hunger.

Education's Real Role

There is a widespread illusion that the purpose of education, especially higher education, is to produce well-rounded human beings who are equipped with a basic thirst for knowledge and curiosity about the world around them. It is a wonderful concept but like most of capitalism's ideas it is a complete fraud. "England's department for higher and further education has been scrapped, just two years after its creation. The prime minister has created a new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills under Lord Mandelson. Universities do not figure in the name of the new department, whose remit is 'to build Britain's capabilities to compete in the global economy'. Number 10 said it would invest in a higher education system committed to widening participation. The role would include 'maintaining world class universities, expanding access to higher education, investing in the UK's science base and shaping skills policy and innovation'". (*BBC News*, 5 June) Far from being concerned about an individual's intellectual development, inside capitalism the purpose of education is dictated by the industrial and commercial needs of the owning class. The UK must compete for world markets therefore it needs an educated working class.

Free Lunch in the Future



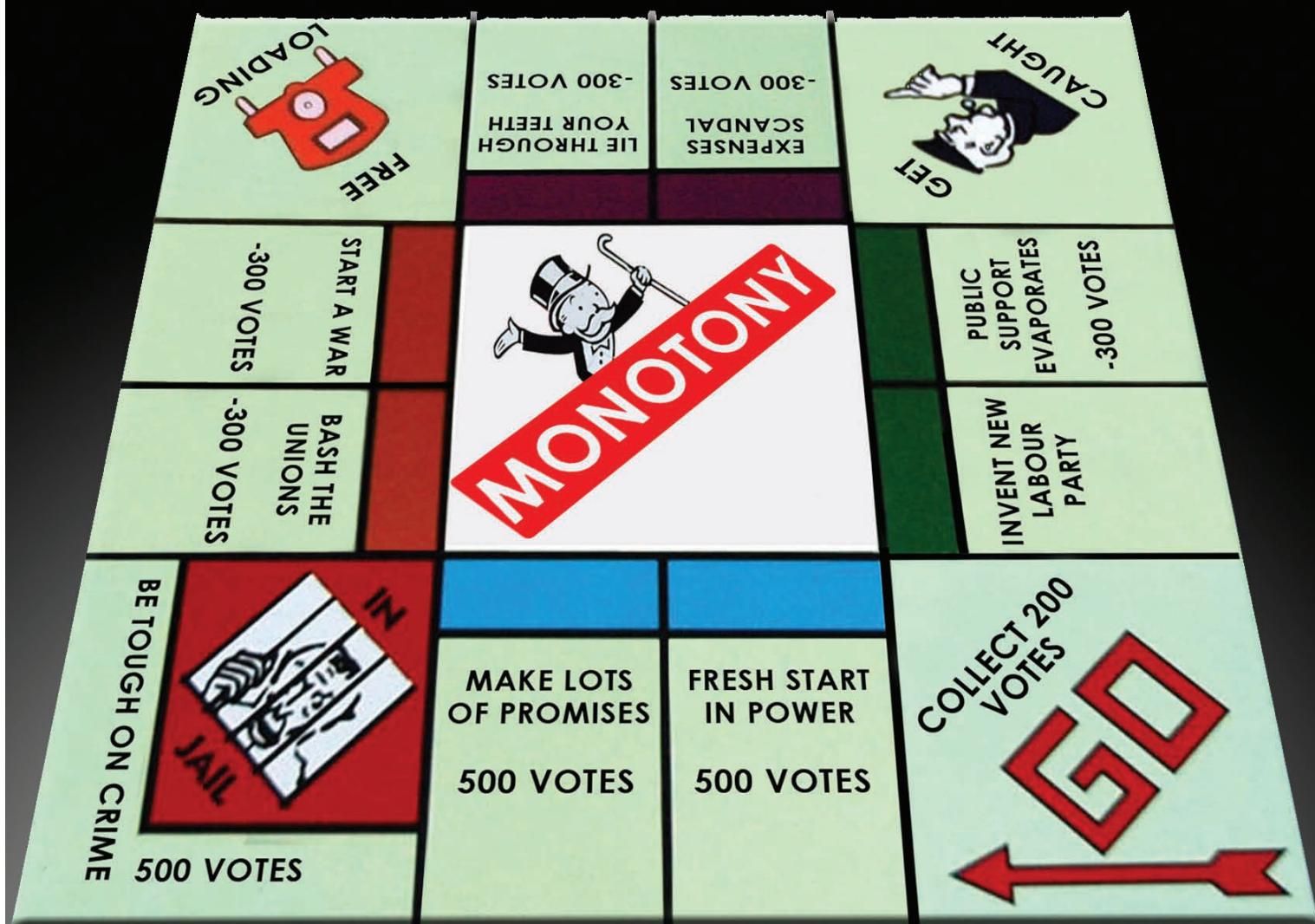
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Bored Games

Why we don't need a new Labour Party



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and labour
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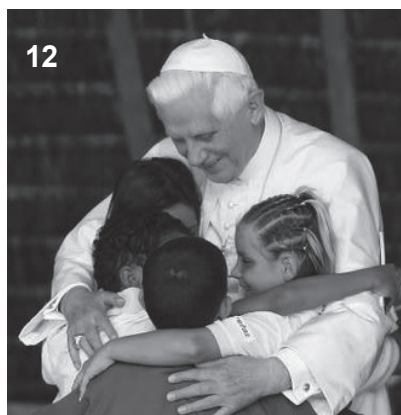
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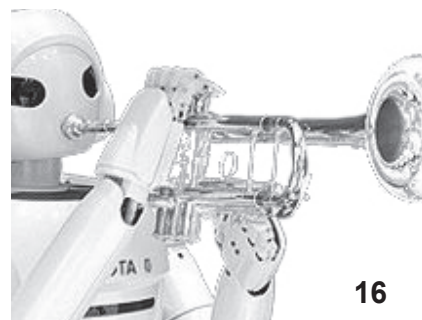
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- 19 One Brick at a Time**
What kind of thing do the bosses of BRIC talk about when they get round a table?

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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 1 August** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial Counting bodies

Just as the Iraqi oil permits and contracts are starting to get signed off, so the numbers of "coalition" (UK and US) troops stationed there are being scaled down. As authority for the stable management of capitalism is handed back to a new Iraqi authority that can be trusted by the likes of Exxon, BP and Shell, so attention turns to the other theatre in the so-called "war against terror", that of Afghanistan.

Last month the total UK military deaths in Afghanistan to date surpassed those in the Iraq conflict (179). When the UK forces ceremonially handed authority to the Iraq state, the name of every UK soldier killed was solemnly read out. The names of Iraqis killed during the same period were not read out, for obvious reasons: it would take 2-3 weeks to complete. No one is keeping much of a score it would seem however. As US General Tommy Franks indicated: "we don't do body counts".

As attention turns to Afghanistan, and to the coffins driven through silenced town centres, there has been renewed debate about what "we" (the UK state) are actually doing there. The idea that "we" are trying to hunt down bin Laden has been quietly shelved. Instead the line we are given is that the British state is "fighting terrorists there in order to ensure we don't have to fight them over here". Stripping away all the state propaganda, the real issue remains clear: they are fighting over there to prop up a friendly government in a country strategically placed to control oil from the Caspian Region. If the Iraq conflict was about extracting the stuff from the ground, the Afghanistan war is about securing an alternative route to get it to market.

Tempting though it may be, you don't need to select between the false options offered by capitalism. You don't have to choose between, on the one hand, supporting the British state's bloody efforts in Afghanistan, and, on the other hand, supporting those unlikeliest of freedom fighters that make up the Taliban. You don't have to choose between the old-fashioned barbarism of the semi-feudal Taliban tribal leaders and war lords, and the modern barbarism of capitalism. World socialists reject that choice. We support neither side. We denounce as obscene the calls to send more weapons to the UK troops in Afghanistan so they can kill more of the tribesmen they are fighting. More crucially, we express a clear and consistent opposition to war, based not merely on emotion or morals, but on recognition that no working class interests are ever at stake in the battles of our leaders or our employers.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain and the parties of the World Socialist Movement have never taken sides in capitalism's wars. Almost 100 years ago, according to the propaganda, the "coalition forces" (allies) went to war (the First World War) in order to "end war". Nowadays the objective is supposedly much the same: to prosecute a war in order to put an end to "terror". But this is similarly doomed. Wars are just a normal part of the mechanism of capitalism, as a means of resolving disputed ownership rights. It is the global working class who overwhelmingly find themselves in the front line and in the crosshairs. While a majority of this class continue to choose to retain capitalism, then war - and the terror it brings - will continue around the globe, and the coffins will keep coming home.



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Trans-Human Socialism

Here's an early notification for the 'Perfect Body Conference', in case you're swinging by Linköping in Sweden between October 9 and 16 and have a consuming interest in 'transhumanism' issues. The blurb describes it thus: 'Enhancement, paraphrased as the improvement of desired characteristics, means to apply a certain focus on abilities, capacities and quality of life. These categories can be viewed and defined from different value-driven perspectives which are based upon certain viewpoints on what constitutes "normality".'

Thinking of giving it a miss? Well, shame, because the transhumanism debate could turn out to be one of socialism's hottest topics, after the grubby internal politics of capitalism has been consigned to the archives. At stake is the question of what 'human' means, now that technology promises the potential of almost unlimited physical and intellectual enhancements, up to and including immortality. At one level, you might think, what is there to debate? Who would wheeze around in an old banger of a body if they could breeze around in a macho Maserati or a female Ferrari? Why be ein dummkopf if you could be Einstein? Why put up with breakdown illnesses and debilitating corrosion if they can be engineered away, leaving you Kwik and Fit? Why die, for heaven's sake?

The debate is raging before the technology has even developed, which is no bad thing, and much of it mirrors current consumerist paradigms, with the libertarian 'devil-take-the-hindmost' transhumanists at one extreme and, glaring at them from the liberal pole, the bleeding-hearts who worry (correctly) that any future Smart Toolkit for beauty, brains and longevity will only be sold in Harrods and not in Halfords. But these are only the two most obvious and energy-lite arguments, and neither penetrate far into the complexities of the issue. Others do, however, and Wikipedia provides an invaluable and entertaining list of these, including the Playing God argument, the Gattaca argument, the Frankenstein, the Eugenics Wars and the Terminator arguments. These criticisms all form points on a gradient between outright infeasibility (the Futurehype argument) and downright undesirability (Terminator).

From a socialist perspective, a debate can be said to have real 'legs' if it can be extended beyond the context of capitalism and still have meaning in a socialist society. From this point of view, most of these arguments presuppose capitalist hierarchical principles and would not survive into socialism.

Is War Past its Sell-by Date?

Socialists would be the first to agree that, since war is not in our genes, it is not inevitable, and that it is therefore possible to conceive of a society without it. *New Scientist* thinks so too (4 July). Indeed, they point to the context-specific nature of war among primates and prehistoric human cultures to show that war is simply one behavioural strategy adopted under certain environmental or social conditions. In fact, they argue, "warfare is on the wane worldwide" due to better social conditions, so that most wars now are small-scale insurgencies: 'the remnants of war'. Passing quickly over the question whether 4 million deaths in the Congo, for example, can be described as 'small-scale', we further learn that individual violence also follows the trend. According to Steven Pinker "Homicide rates in modern Europe, for example, are more than 10 times lower than they were in the Middle Ages" (although one wonders how Pinker can confidently assert this, in the absence of comprehensive records from Ye medieval Olde Bille).

And so we are brought to the inevitable Big Question: could capitalism abolish war? At this point *New Scientist* finally reins in the optimism and offers some caveats:

Will the technology fail to serve all humanity and instead reflect and extend today's social divisions and class barriers? Yes, probably. What else would you expect? The smart money is on immortal elites backed up by armies of supersoldiers – another reason to get socialism soon, before our working class descendants have the capability of independent thinking bred right out of them. Meanwhile disabled people, in the face of the transhumanist ideal of 'perfectibility', are looking nervously back over their shoulders at the eugenics movement of the 1930s and its macabre culmination in the Nazi death-camps. For them, as for other groups historically classified as 'Other', 'transhuman' carries an extra chill undertone, like the phrase 'defect-free' or perhaps 'unJewish'.

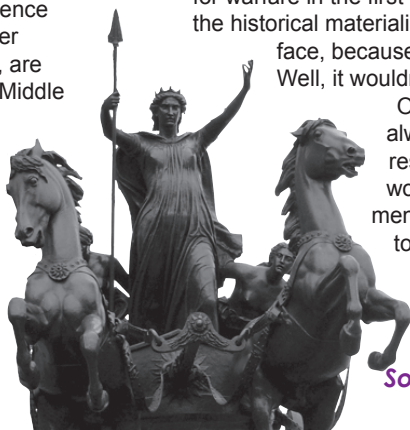
But that is today's debate, within the context of capitalism. The fear of being marginalised and oppressed by modifications to the definition of 'Normal' could not conceivably be exported into a society which has abolished the class basis of oppression. Nor would people, in a society without systems of social preferment, need to be paranoid about genetically engineered social elites. Where it gets interesting is when transhumanism invites one to ask even more fundamental questions which even socialism would struggle with. What exactly is a human, and what level of enhancement, if any, ought to be considered 'enough'?

Socialist society is inclusive in its nature, which means that people are not to be judged or excluded on the basis of how pretty, young or smart they are. But what if it embraces the technology to make everyone 'perfect', and if so, who decides what 'perfect' is, and what would this say about social and biological diversity? And what of death, that ultimate motivator and engine of evolution? Would the achievement of immortality create a socialist society of incomparable cultural and technical sophistication or, conversely, a dispiriting world of torpid, plastic-faced Barbie dolls who can't see the point of opening a book? Would the quest for perfection ultimately allow humans to conquer the stars, or make us so niche-specific that we became unable to adapt to future environmental upheavals, thus triggering our own extinction? Even given such imponderables, could any species, no matter how intelligent, ever resist the lure of this Pandora's Box? When the time comes to formulate the political agenda of socialist society, transhumanism will surely be right up there, because it calls into question everything that humans think they know about being human.

"Major obstacles to peace include the lack of tolerance inherent in religious fundamentalism, which not only triggers conflicts but often contributes to the suppression of women; global warming, which will produce ecological crises that may spark social unrest and violence; overpopulation, particularly when it produces a surplus of unmarried, unemployed young men, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction."

From a socialist perspective, they've left out the biggest obstacle of all, the war-engendering nature of property-owning capitalism itself. This omission seems all the more mysterious given their opening premise: that all the available evidence suggests that agriculture and land-ownership were responsible for warfare in the first place. Could it be that they are shirking the historical materialist conclusion that is staring them in the face, because the implication is too uncomfortable? Well, it wouldn't be the first time.

Or perhaps it's naïve to expect scientists always to be scientific. One Harvard researcher offers the quaint idea that "since women are less prone to violence than men" their promotion into government ought to reduce the likelihood of future wars. You don't need a Harvard degree to smell the logical rat there.



Globalisation

Dear Editors

"Is globalisation just another word for capitalism? The short answer is yes" (Book Reviews, *Socialist Standard*, July 2009).

Globalisation is not the same as capitalism. It is a process occurring within capitalism. It has predominated in recent decades, but it was not predominant at earlier stages of the development of capitalism. It will not necessarily continue to be predominant.

It is important to distinguish between capitalism and globalisation because many opponents of globalisation advocate not socialism but the restoration of national capitalism. STEPHEN SHENFIELD (by email)

Reply:

That depends on what is meant by "globalisation". In the middle of the nineteenth century Marx and Engels gave a vivid description that could equally apply to the present day:

"All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations" (*Communist Manifesto*, 1848).

This "golden age" of globalisation was brought to an abrupt end in 1914 with the start of the First World War and the abandonment of the international gold standard. Thereafter globalisation continued with the help of increased state intervention. Capitalism has an inherent tendency towards globalisation, driven by the competitive accumulation of profits. Globalisation is not a particular arrangement of institutions, for example deregulated markets, or a particular ideology such as neo-liberalism. Of course there are many opponents of "globalisation" who want a restoration of national capitalism, and we agree it is important to counter their faulty conception of what constitutes capitalism - *Editors*.

Fascist?

Dear Editors,

I am writing in response to Adam Buick's article about the BNP. Whilst I would whole-heartedly agree that the best way to deal with the BNP is to confront their ideology head-on, and debate with them if necessary in order to expose the paucity of their ideas, I do feel that it is naive to state that "the BNP is not a fascist party." Their constitution may not be overtly fascist, and they may no longer espouse fascism in their public utterances, but it would hardly be a vote-winner if they did! Is it really believable that, if the BNP came to power, they would still guarantee free speech to their opponents, or meekly allow themselves to be voted out again a few years later? Er... Remember that Nick Griffin is on record as stating that "well-aimed boots and fists" will win out over "rational argument"!

Regarding their claims not to be racist, I can only recall an incident from when I lived in east London 15-20 years ago. In those days, the BNP was more of a localised nuisance than a national threat. They used to expound their "policies" by means of small credit-card sized stickers stuck to lamp-posts or other available surfaces. "Hang Black Muggers" is one particular gem that springs to mind. In any case, I recall seeing two of these stickers side-by-side; one read, "Protect British Jobs - Ban Imports." Alongside this (this still being the Apartheid era), was another which read, "Boycott the Boycott - Buy South African!"

Ridiculous they may be, but these people are gradually obtaining positions of influence. It is important to expose them for what they are, but please do not underestimate them. SHANE ROBERTS, Bristol

Reply:

Irrespective of whether or not the BNP meets the historical criteria for being labelled fascist, their racism and extreme nationalism is bad enough - *Editors*.

Opportunism

Dear Editors,

Before retiring, I was a member of the MSF union. (MSF stood for Manufacturing, Science and Finance). One month the union newsletter carried an article about how membership was being boosted by the recruitment of clergymen. I wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury asking that, as neither

Manufacturing nor Science covered the activities of god's representatives, could I assume their efforts were chiefly concerned with Finance? He didn't reply.

However, God apparently does have to take his finances very seriously. In common with numerous other multi-millionaires, his wealth is not what it was. And as always, it's the workers who suffer when the bosses' money isn't rolling in fast enough. As a cost cutting measure, the Church of England is now looking at proposals to shed the jobs of some of my ex-fellow union members bishops and senior clergy.

It is concerned that the value of its investment portfolio last year was only £4.4 billion. (Yes, 4.4 billion). In 2007 it was £5.7 billion. Another proposal under consideration which might save your local bishop from having to sign on, is to encourage congregations to be more generous with their donations. Although they currently provide the C of E with £600 million a year, it has been estimated that if they contributed 5 percent of their income, an extra £300 million a year would be generated.

It has also been suggested, in all seriousness apparently, that priests should preach more about the value of generosity. The Rt Rev John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, worried about his job perhaps, is quoted as saying "A time of recession is also a time of opportunity ..."

Now that's what I call opportunism.

NICK WHITE, Luton

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Exploitation in Uzbekistan

UZBEKISTAN HAS been in the news. According the BBC and the *Observer* (24 May) the government has been forcing hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren to pick cotton in the searing heat, and to live in squalid conditions, on "pitiful wages",

Uzbekistan the world's third largest exporter of cotton. Uzbek state-owned and controlled cotton has been sold to some of the world's largest retailers, such as Asda, Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Wal-Mart, earning it more than one billion dollars to date.

The International Labour Organisation, however, has recently got the Uzbek government to sign conventions committing it to stop using child labour in its cotton industry. A number of retailers, including Asda and Tesco, are reported as having pulled out of Uzbekistan. Whether the government will implement the ILO conventions remains to be seen.

During the 19th century the area of Central Asia of which modern Uzbekistan is a part, was known as Turkestan, which was incorporated into the Tsarist Empire in the 1860s. The majority of the population were Moslems.

With the downfall of Tsarism the area broke away from Russia; but, after bloody nationalist uprisings, was finally recaptured by Soviet Russia. Uzbekistan became a Soviet Republic in 1924.

Sovietisation

After the overthrow of the Tsar in 1917, the Bolsheviks gained in influence, and played an increasingly prominent role in the Tashkent soviet, eventually gaining control. They then extended their control to other towns in the area.

In February, 1925, the Communist Party of Uzbekistan held its first congress. It was the only legal party in the country. The second congress, held in November the same year, put through land reforms. Between 1930 and 1934, more than 40,000 peasant "kulak" holdings were forcibly liquidated, and their former owners were either deported or executed. Collectivisation and industrialisation was implemented on a large scale.

The Stalinist purges of 1925 and 1937 were particularly drastic in Uzbekistan. The prime minister, Faizullah Khodzhaev, and the Party first secretary, Ikramov, were accused of organising a nationalist plot, with the assistance of British agents, and were both shot. Previously, the Soviet authorities, in line with developing capitalist industry, persuaded or forced women to abandon the burka and the veil. But hundreds of them were killed by their own husbands and relatives for violating the essential commandments of Islam.

King Cotton

By the beginning of the Second World War, Uzbekistan had become "the most powerful and economically most developed of all the republics of Central Asia" (*Economic Geography of the USSR*, N. Baransky, Moscow, 1956,

p.370); and had become the main cotton producer of the Soviet Union.

Uzbekistan is not particularly large compared with other Central Asian countries (it is 447,400 km² or 172,700 miles²); but it has a population of about 23 million (compared with Kazakhstan's five million), of whom 70 percent are Uzbeks. The second largest nationality are Russians. It is bordered by Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, with the Aral Sea to the northwest of the country.

From 1930 to 1945 Uzbekistan went through a period of rapid industrialisation. Oil production, and copper and coal mining, were all developed. Hundreds of thousands of former peasants, many of them displaced Russians, became wage slaves. But above all, cotton became King.

Uzbekistan produced cotton decades before the Soviet era. But following Soviet control, the aim consisted of maximising cotton production regardless of the interests of the local Uzbek population. Under Tsarist rule the cotton-growing area of what is now Uzbekistan, was about one million acres by the beginning of 1914. In 1950, it had increased to 2.5 million acres. "Large-scale irrigation work with the aim to extend the area under cotton was carried out in the 1951-1955 period in the central, most desert part of the Ferghana Valley" (Baransky, p.372). The area under cultivation in Uzbekistan is now more than 3 million acres. Numerous cotton-ginning plants and cotton mills have been constructed.

At the same time, however, the Soviet regime diminished the cereal-growing areas from 3.8 million acres in 1913 to 3.5 million acres by 1938. With an increase in population of nearly two million between 1926 and 1939, Uzbekistan became more dependent on food supplies from Russia. During the war, the population of Uzbekistan increased again by another two million. The food situation became critical. All of which, then and later, increased "bourgeois nationalist" discontent in the country.

Post-Soviet Independence

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan emerged as a sovereign state in 1991. It did not become even a limited "bourgeois democracy". The media is tightly controlled. The United Nations report that torture is systematic. The country has been denied cash from most "international financial" institutions; and unemployment is currently 40 percent.

However, "former US president George W. Bush started funding the uncompromising president, Karimov, after the country allowed US planes to stop there in the run-up to the Afghanistan invasion" (*Observer*, 24 May).

Meanwhile, Uzbek workers, young and old, continue to be exploited, repressed and robbed, creating surplus value and profits for the local, and overseas, capitalists.

PETER E. NEWELL







A WORLD WITHOUT LEADERS

"For about 94,000 of the 100,000 years of human history, people lived and organised themselves as hunter-gatherers without a centralized leadership apparatus. Hunter-gatherers began the transition to early chiefdoms and embryonic states between 3,000 and 6,000 years ago. Only in the previous 100-500 years have there been state-level polities. The earliest human societies were acephalous: they existed without formal rulers or leaders. For this reason, they were also probably without heroes, a pattern which is starkly at odds with what has been claimed of human history generally and which also contrasts with the contemporary leadership field." Taken from the inaugural lecture on "Leadership: Its genealogy, configuration and trajectory" by Peter Gronn, Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge. (*Independent*, 17 June)

CANCER AND THE PROFIT MOTIVE

"Supplies of vital medicines, including those used in the fight against cancer, are running short because UK pharmacies and drug wholesalers are selling them abroad to maximise profits. ... The shortage is being caused by the falling value of sterling which has meant that UK pharmacies and drug wholesalers can earn greater returns by selling medicines to the continent. ... Last night leading cancer charities expressed alarm at the situation. 'Cancer Research UK urges the Department of Health to ensure that no patient experiences any delay in getting prescription drugs,' said Hilary Jackson, the organisation's policy manager. 'We are concerned to hear of cases where patients have been delayed access to prescribed medication or have to find an alternative supplier. This causes extra distress at an already difficult time'" (*Observer*, 5 July)

OWNERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE

"Ten years ago, a piece of software called Napster taught us that scarcity is no longer a law of nature. The physics of our universe would allow everyone with access to a networked computer to enjoy, for free, every song, every film, every book, every piece of research, every computer program, every last thing that could be made out of digital ones and zeros. The question became not, will nature allow it, but will our legal and economic system ever allow it? This is a question about the future of capitalism, the economic system that arose from scarcity. Ours is the era of expanded copyright systems and enormous portfolios of dubious patents, of trade secrecy, the privatisation of the fruits of publicly funded research, and other phenomena that we collectively term 'intellectual property'. As technology has made a new abundance of knowledge possible, politicians, lawyers, corporations and university administrations have become more and more determined to preserve its scarcity. So will we cling to scarcity just so that we can keep capitalism?" (*New Scientist*, 24 June)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic Travelodge, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 26th. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email:julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail: 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

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South West branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

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Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of

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Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

Cardiff and District. John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

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Sharing with Shah

Eddie Shah? Wasn't he the capitalist who in 1982 tried to break the print unions and provoked a bitter industrial dispute that lasted seven months and which he eventually won thanks to invoking Thatcher's newly-introduced anti-union laws? Indeed, he is. He has now found another way to exploit the labour of other people:

"The former newspaper owner Eddie Shah is inviting the public to grow vegetables on his land – but demanding that they hand over 60 per cent of their produce. Mr Shah has offered to give over two acres of his estate to be used by gardeners. Most of their vegetables would then be served in his restaurants" (*Times*, 30 June).

This is not quite a return to feudalism where serfs were obliged to work so many days on the estate of the lord of the manor. It's the same principle though, and corresponds to one way in which in some countries those who worked the land were exploited in the sense of being deprived of a part of the fruits of their labour. "Sharecropping", as it was known, was for instance the system that replaced chattel slavery in the American South after the North won the Civil War. The "free" Negroes were still exploited, but by this new method.

Whereas under the wages system exploitation is hidden, under sharecropping (as well as under serfdom and chattel slavery) it is obvious. The producers directly surrender a part of what they produce to somebody else.

It was the same when Shah was a newspaper owner, but not so obvious, because it was then done through money and not in kind. Shah paid his journalists, printers and other workers a wage for the use of their working skills (what Marx called their "labour power") for an agreed period. The amount of money they received corresponded more or less (probably less as he employed non-union labour) to the monetary value of the working skills they sold him. This appears to be a fair transaction. The workers have something to sell; they sell its use for a contracted period; and get paid its value (what it cost to produce, i.e. the costs of the necessities and minor luxuries needed to reproduce it on a weekly or a monthly basis). And that appears to be it.

But it isn't. The amount of labour-time required to reproduce a worker's labour-power for, say, a month (i.e. to produce what he or she needs to consume in a month) is not the same as the value of what a worker can produce in a month. Not at all. In fact it is considerably less. For instance, it might only take 12 days labour-time to produce a worker's monthly needs. But that doesn't mean that workers can stop after working only 12 days. They will have contracted to work for the whole month and this they must do. So, they have to work a further 18 days, free, for their employer. This unpaid labour is the source of the employer's profits and is in fact why the employer employed the worker in the first place. It is as if the worker only kept 40 percent of what they produced. Just as under Shah's revived sharecropping scheme.

But Shah needs to be careful. Sharecroppers can organise just as wage and salary workers can. In fact they did organise in America in the 1920s and 1930s. And by asking for 60 percent he is already fixing a higher rate of exploitation than the ex-slaveowners did in the post-slavery South. They only took 50 percent.

The Pope and the cardinals of the Vatican help organize tours of Auschwitz for Hezbollah members to teach them how to wipe out Jews, according to a booklet being distributed to Israel Defense Forces soldiers. Officials encouraging the booklet's distribution include senior officers, such as Lt. Col. Tamir Shalom, the commander of the Nahshon Battalion of the Kfir Brigade. The booklet was published by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, in cooperation with the chief rabbi of Safed, Rabbi Shmuel Eliahu, and has been distributed for the past few months:

<http://tinyurl.com/lx6ubl>

Anwar, 15, can't read or write, but says he's good at tunnel work. He needs a new job as Israeli planes bombed his workplace, one of hundreds of smuggling tunnels on Gaza's border with Egypt:

<http://tinyurl.com/kuh5fq>

London's Conservative Mayor **Boris Johnson** has been labelled "out of touch" with millions of Londoners after he described the £250,000 he is paid for a weekly column in the *as* "chicken feed". He said it was "wholly reasonable" to take the annual fee on top of his £140,000 salary as mayor:

<http://tinyurl.com/kprjlp>

Sheehan's pitch is to free ourselves from our co-dependency with the Robber Class. "...Only buy used, only use cash or bank debit cards, or only buy from local merchants," she recently wrote. They can only steal from us if we enable them." And when the Robber Class steals from us they generally get away with it. Sheehan argues that Bernie Madoff was punished so severely because he stole from the rich:

<http://tinyurl.com/ld6vfr>

Tens of thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses gathered on Friday at Berlin's Olympic Stadium and four other major German cities for an international congress, predicting the demise of the "current global system."

<http://tinyurl.com/nahfzu>

"Yes, I'm fully prepared for this. I have concluded that the wars [in Iraq and Afghanistan] are not going to be ended by politicians or people at the top. They're not responsive to people, they're responsive to corporate America. The only way to make them responsive to the needs of the people is for soldiers to not fight their wars. If soldiers won't fight their wars, the wars won't happen. I hope I'm setting an example for other soldiers."

<http://tinyurl.com/nv923a>

When the Honduran military overthrew the democratically elected government of Manuel Zelaya two weeks ago there might have been a sigh of relief in the corporate board rooms of Chiquita banana. Earlier this year the Cincinnati-based fruit company joined Dole in criticizing the government in Tegucigalpa which had raised the minimum wage by 60%. Chiquita complained that the new regulations would cut into company profits, requiring the firm to spend more on costs than in Costa Rica: 20 cents more to produce a crate of pineapple and ten cents more to produce a crate of bananas to be exact. In all, Chiquita fretted that it would lose millions under Zelaya's labor reforms since the company produced around 8 million crates of pineapple and 22 million crates of bananas per year

<http://tinyurl.com/lbbv8n>

Why we don't need another Labour party



The Labour Party has failed, so let's start a new one. That's what some trade unionists and leftwingers are saying. That would be to repeat a mistake.

The Labour Party was founded by the trade unions, supported by some political groups (Keir Hardie's ILP, the Fabians), to be a group in parliament pressing for legislation favourable to trade unions and their members. Originally called the Labour Representation Committee, it became the Labour Party after the 1906 General Election when enough "Labour" MPs were elected to form a parliamentary group.

That wasn't the only choice before the working class at the time. Socialists within the Marxist-influenced SDF proposed another way: that, instead of aiming at reforms of capitalism to be obtained by a pressure group in parliament, the working class should aim directly at obtaining socialism – the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production – as the only framework within which the problems they faced under capitalism could be effectively and lastingly dealt with. This was the policy advocated by those who broke away from the SDF in 1904 to set up us, the Socialist Party.

That was the choice: Labourism or Socialism? Unfortunately, most working class activists chose Labourism. In 1918 the Labour Party adopted a new constitution changing it from being a pressure group in parliament into a fully-fledged political party, with individual members. The declared aim was to eventually win a parliamentary majority and form a government that would gradually introduce socialism (actually, nationalisation or state capitalism, as set out in Clause IV of the constitution).

Labour in office

In the 1924 general election the Labour Party ended up with the most seats and the Liberal Party allowed a minority Labour government, under Ramsay MacDonald, to come into office. It lasted less than a year, but this was enough to show the ruling class that the Labour Party could be trusted to loyally manage the affairs of the British Empire. A second minority Labour government came into office in 1929 but was overwhelmed by the world slump that followed the Wall Street Crash and left office ignominiously in 1931, unable to stop unemployment growing (and proposing to cut un-

Above: some of the leaders of the early Labour party

employment benefit and civil service wages). Their leader MacDonald even went over to the Tories as Prime Minister in a Tory-dominated "National" government.

In 1945 Labour finally won a parliamentary majority. Clement Attlee took over from Churchill as Prime Minister. This time there were no excuses. The post-war Labour government did carry out a large part of the Labour Party's reformist programme, nationalising coal, gas, electricity, water, rail, air and some road transport, and bringing in a national health service and a national unemployment, sickness and pensions scheme. This wasn't socialism but it was a fairly radical reform of capitalism, even if motivated by the need to reconstruct British capitalism after the war as much as by a desire to improve working class conditions. At the same time the Attlee government presided over the development of the British A-bomb and got involved in war in Malaya and Korea. Despite the nationalisations and the reforms, in 1951 the electors voted Churchill and the Tories back. They stayed till 1964 when the Labour Party, under Harold Wilson, again obtained a parliamentary majority after what they called "thirteen wasted years".

The 1964 Wilson Labour government was a complete failure. Economic circumstances made a mockery of their "national plan" to increase production smoothly and led to successive devaluations of the pound. In the end the government settled down to governing capitalism in the only way it can be: as a profit-making system in the interest of those who live off profits and against the interests of those who live off wages and salaries. Improved state benefits introduced in the first few months of the government were clawed back and "wage restraint", even for a while a "wage freeze", was imposed. A document *In Place of Strife* proposing to restrict trade union activity was drawn up. They didn't have time to push it through but this was a factor in their losing the 1970 election.

Criticism confirmed

We in the Socialist Party pointed out our original criticism of Labourism had now been confirmed beyond doubt. It was not possible either

to reform capitalism into socialism by means of a series of reforms enacted by parliament or to make capitalism work in the interest of the majority class of wage and salary earners. Instead of the Labour Party gradually changing capitalism, the opposite happened. Capitalism gradually changed the Labour Party into an ordinary alternative party taking its turn to manage the affairs of British capitalism.

But Labourist reformism was to have one more go at reforming capitalism. The Heath Tory government elected in 1970 proved a disaster, with double-digit inflation. In preparation for the coming general election, in 1973 the Labour Party adopted a policy document which spoke about a “fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families”. Denis Healey, the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, hinted at squeezing the rich till the pips squeaked. Labour won the 1974 election, but the new Labour government (first under Wilson, then from 1976 under James Callaghan) proved unable, too, to control double-digit inflation. Instead of squeezing the rich, Healey, now the real Chancellor, had to go cap in hand to the IMF to get money just to keep normal government spending going. There were strings attached and it was low-paid public sector workers who were squeezed, leading to the winter of discontent of 1978/9. Labour lost the 1979 election. Margaret Thatcher took over and reversed most of the reforms that the Attlee government had introduced.

The Labour Party took some time to adjust to the new situation, even choosing for a while the leftwing journalist and orator, Michael Foot, as its leader. They lost the 1984, 1989 and 1992 general elections. Then came Blair. He realised that, unless the Labour Party abandoned the original Labourist project of trying to transform society by a series of nationalisations and reforms, it would never get back into office. Clause IV was accordingly abandoned. It worked. Labour – calling itself “New Labour” – won the 1997 election and again in 2001 and 2005.

The Blair Labour governments, however, were not like previous ones. They did not set out to reform capitalism to benefit workers and fail. They set out to simply manage capitalism for the capitalists and succeeded. It was plain for all to see that the Labour Party was no longer a “Labour” party, no longer a party committed to improving conditions for trade unionists and their members, but just another ordinary capitalist party like the Tories and the Liberals.

After a century of failure, Labourism no longer existed. The working class was back where it had been nearly a century previous-



Above: Arthur Scargill, leader of the Socialist Labour Party

ly: faced with the choice between two openly capitalist parties, not the Tories and the Liberals as then, but now the Tories and Labour.

Same choice

The same strategic choice now confronts the working class as it did in 1900. There are those who want to repeat the mistake that was then made and who want to form a new Labour party based on the trade unions. This is what Arthur Scargill tried to do with the “Socialist Labour Party” he set up in 1996. It’s what Militant, after being kicked out of the Labour Party, now propose with their campaign for a “New Workers Party”. It was what the SWP thought could happen with Respect and which George Galloway, who now controls it, perhaps still does. There is even an organisation called, again, the Labour Representation Committee.

But why? Surely one of the two main lessons of the 20th century has been that Labourism is a dead end (the other being that neither is state capitalist dictatorship as in former USSR a way to socialism). It can’t succeed. Not because its leaders are insincere or incompetent or corrupt or not resolute enough. It fails because it sets itself the impossible mission of trying to gradually reform capitalism into socialism. This can’t be done, as experience, not just theoretical understanding, has confirmed.

No doubt Scargill and the new Labour Representation Committee are sincere, though the same cannot be said of Militant or the SWP (they only want another mass party of Labour so they can infiltrate it and fish for members for their respective, and rival, vanguard parties).

But surely what is required is not a new Labour party but a party with socialism as its explicit aim and a policy of doing all it can to bring this into being. Since at the moment a majority still want or acquiesce in capitalism, in the im-

mediate future this will have to involve campaigning for socialism, winning people over to socialism. Which is what we advocated in 1904 and what, in our small way, we have been doing ever since, despite the Labour road which most of the rest of the working class decided to take.

If the mistakes of the 20th century are not to be repeated this century the last thing that is needed today is a non-socialist, trade-union based “Labour” party. We’ve already been there, and it doesn’t work.

ADAM BUICK

Below: members of the Labour Representation Committee



The power behind the shame

It was the political power that the Catholic Church once exercised in Ireland that allowed it to cover up for so long the child abuse exposed in the recent Ryan Report.

I travelled to Dublin in the early 1950s as a member of a delegation from a Northern Ireland Labour group. Our purpose was to discuss with the leaders of the Irish Labour Party the desirability and feasibility of extending this party into Northern Ireland.

The Irish Labour Party was then part of the coalition government which abandoned the constitutional ties with Great Britain and declared the state of Eire "The Republic of Ireland". Its leader was William Norton who was the Coalition's Deputy Prime Minister (Tánaiste) and Minister of Labour. He was the Leader of the delegation we were meeting on the Sunday morning. The rest of its delegates were Senator Luke Duffy, the Party's General Secretary, James Larkin (son of the courageous Labour Leader of 1912 fame) and Roddy Connolly, (the son of James Connolly, the erstwhile socialist who was executed by the British for his part in the 1916 Easter Rising).

We met in the Tánaiste's office, a very grand location in, if I remember correctly, Merrion Square. Connolly had met our delegation the previous evening and he and three of our delegates were nursing the consequences of the hospitality. Norton sat in grandeur behind a massive desk that would have silenced the impoverished; he looked and sounded unctuous, distracting from his excellent delivery with a continuous 'washing' action of his hands.

I threw a bomb into the pleasantries when I asked him if it was true that he had told journalists during the elections just passed that Labour's policy was not only compatible with Catholic social doctrine but was actually based on *Rerum Novarum*, a Papal Encyclical "on the Condition of the working classes", from the prolific pen of Pope Leo XIII released some 59 years earlier in May 1891.

Norton prefaced his politician's reply with a sloppy compliment to my youth and what he perceived to be the intensity of my idealism. but I had to learn that politics was the art of the possible. Another member

of our delegation, Michael Callaghan - the only one who, like me, was not a Catholic - equated the remark I had attributed to Norton with the comment of a North of Ireland Prime Minister that his was a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people.

Larkin stood by the window, silent, sullen; Connolly, too, despite pledges of the previous evening, when he'd quipped about bishop's with invisible Ministerial portfolios, was silent. On being pressed to answer Norton agreed that he might have made the remark. *Rerum Novarum* was an old document...he couldn't exactly remember the detail of its main thrust - but Russian 'communism' had made things awkward for Labour in a Catholic country.

The rest of our delegation were untroubled by the implications of the suggestion that the Leader of the Irish Labour Party who held the Labour portfolio in the Irish government overtly agreed with the bitterly anti-socialist, anti-democratic Papal bigot whose conception of freedom was naked corporative capitalism under the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church. They were there to make history and, anyway, we had to show courtesy.

Callaghan and I knew we had been rebuked by serious aspirants to professionalism - and political ambition in a country where the Church was an invisible upper chamber had frightening portents. The reality of these were corruptive of the democratic process in an allegedly democratic country.

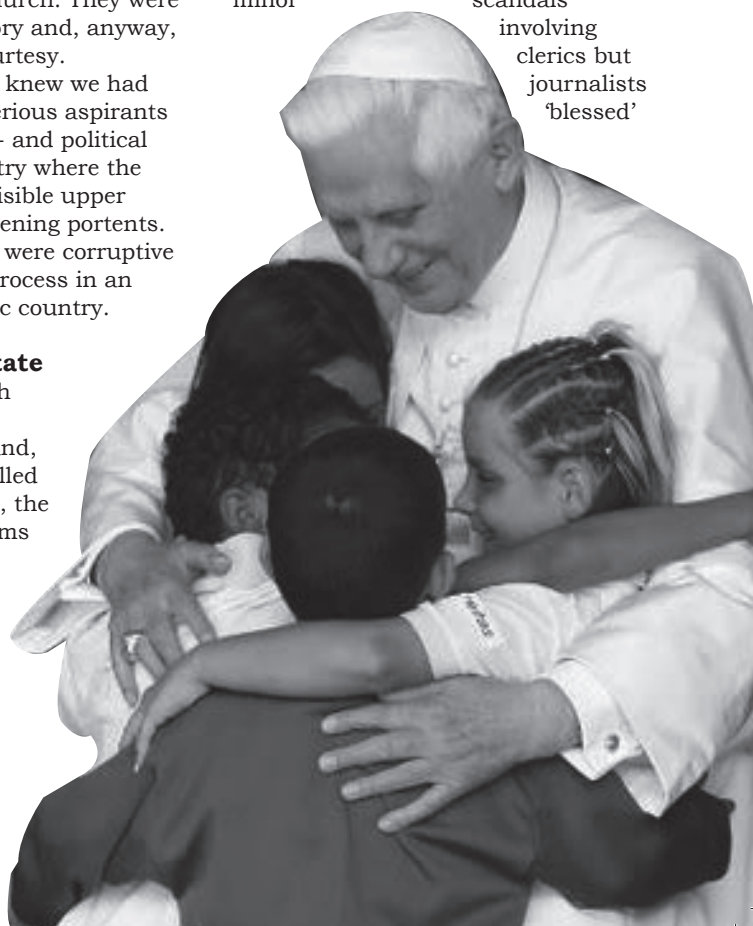
The Unfree State

When the British withdrew from the greater part of Ireland, henceforth to be called the Irish Free State, the IRA split on the terms of the settlement with Britain, and a bloody civil war ensued. Under these warring conditions administrative structures had to be developed. The

war with Britain was for *faith* and fatherland; those who were killing one another in an internecine war over the nature of the fatherland were at least united in *faith* and there was no discernable concern about the Catholic Church becoming almost wholly responsible for the general 'education' of the young, including places of care and security like orphanages and juvenile penal institutions.

The approximately 27 percent of the population of Ireland who were not Catholics and might have acted as a counterweight to the arrogant authoritarianism of the Catholic bishops were now largely concentrated in Northern Ireland. Only some 9 percent of the population of the Free State was non-Catholic, mainly Protestant. These latter had been identified with the enemy during the three years of fierce guerrilla war that preceded the new constitutional arrangements and they were not anxious to be involved in controversy, especially controversy pertaining to the power of the church.

There were from time to time minor scandals involving clerics but journalists 'blessed'





*Facing page: Pope Benedict XVI.
Far left: Eamon De Valera, the main
architect of the civil war. Left: Clann na
Poblachta leader Sean McBride*

themselves in the presence of a priest and 'housewives' brought out the china cup and saucer for his visit and, of course, everybody knew that the pleasant-looking young ladies that frequently wined or dined with them in the local hotels were their sisters. The State maintained a censor and an Index of banned books on which appeared the titles of any Irish writer who ever wrote an honest word. Nothing of significance happened without the attendance of a priest.

In 1926 the republican rebels who had been defeated in the civil war reformed politically under the aegis of Fianna Fail and achieved control of government in 1932. The new Taoiseach (Prime Minister) was Eamon De Valera, the main architect of the civil war; an austere, well-informed Catholic. In 1937 his government changed the name of the state to Eire and introduced a new constitution in which was mentioned the favoured place of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The New Republic

In 1948 the political inertia of the years of official neutrality during the second World War to end all wars came to an end with the spawning of yet another incarnation of republicanism in the shape of the Clann na Poblachta. The new Party was led by Sean McBride who had been chief-of-staff of the IRA before the war and had resigned his position when the IRA's Army Council agreed to the planting of bombs in England. McBride was a French-educated lawyer and senior counsel who, incidentally, was later involved in the founding of Amnesty International.

The new Party was optimistic about its chances of winning a majority in the Dail (Irish

Parliament). In the event they won a credible ten seats and went into a coalition with the Irish Labour Party, Fine Gael, National Labour and a Farmers' Party - the latter two now demised - under the leadership of John A Costello. The coalition contained some figures regarded as radical within an Irish context; it made Eire "the Republic of Ireland", it flirted with notions of changes in education and health but it surrendered before the power of the bishops and their priestocracy.

The Coalition's Minister of Health, Dr Noel Browne, was a young medical doctor who was in remission from tuberculosis - a poverty-promoted pulmonary illness rife in Ireland. I had met Browne at an early meeting of the Clann na Poblachta; he claimed he was a socialist but his sole political preoccupation seemed to be a well-intentioned obsession with the need for a system of state-structured health care and it was no surprise when he introduced a Bill to provide free health care for pregnant women and children up to the age of sixteen.

Bishopspeak

Unfortunately, health, like education, was deemed by the bishops to be a vital part of the Church's constituency. Governance over education was clearly prescribed under the Church's *Code of Canon Law cc. 1381, 1382*. Control of the minds of the young was vital to the adult acceptance of the outrageous basis of religious belief while control of the ramshackle health provision was an important instrument of social control and evidence of a 'caring' church.

The threat of even a very limited secularised health service enraged the bishops. They were, of course

entitled, like any other interested party, to offer their opinion but they were not 'any other interested party'. The then Archbishop of Dublin.

John Charles McQuaid issued an *instruction* for Dr Browne to meet him and a coterie of his arrogant colleagues at the Archbishopric at 24 hours' notice. The proposed health service was abandoned and the Minister of Health replaced; the puny mercies of the proposed service would have to wait for another day when material conditions would clear away some of the cobwebs of ignorant and superstition that history had imposed on the people.

Just as electricity had played a major role in banishing the fairies new material conditions in the Republic were putting the myths under strain. Those who knew from their awful experiences - and there were thousands of them - that many of the Church's educational and 'care' institutions were cesspits of sexual, physical and emotional depravity were terrorised into silence but there were whisperings now; the Index, as the banned books listings was called, was no longer tenable and the bishops could not ban the airwaves. Even more pertinently, Ireland was strategically placed on the western flank of an expanding Common Market. New technologies were leading to much greater mobility of capital which, in turn demanded vastly expanded educational and training facility.

All the sexual taboos which Popes railed about, while the Church manoeuvred its clerics around the world to escape child abuse charges, were increasingly unenforceable in the Republic. New living standards needed two incomes and the 'rhythm method', the Church's absurd means of contraception, was not only

emotionally sordid and restrictive but often ineffective. Wits in Ireland were known to question where they would get a ceili band in the middle of the night and when an Irish-American beauty revealed that the father of her teenage son was the stringent Bishop Casey of Galway it was legitimate to ask why he was not using the rhythm method.

The church's dirty washing was becoming public. Early offerings were decent priests who had abandoned the holy pretence to identify with their sexual partners and provide for their children. They were not the 'bad apples' the very devout perceived them to be; the real bad apples, whole orchards of them, priests, nuns and Christian Brothers remained in the fold to torture and rape innocent children whose care they had been charged with all sorts of power-lusting, creative abuse was waiting to be revealed by tens of thousands of victims against a thousand members of religious orders.

Eventually public disquiet became so clamorous that the Irish government, fearful of legal action by victims for dereliction of the State's duty of care had to do something about it. Given the abundance of proven cases not only in Ireland but in other countries throughout the world where paedophile Irish priests had been moved by church authorities in order to escape the opprobrium that their public conviction would bring on the Church, it was reasonable to expect swift and intensive action into sources of information that would help the Authorities to get details of the identity of the criminals and their current location. But the Garda did not bring their battering rams to the doors of Bishoprics where such information might be found. Not a single officer of the Church who was complicit in withholding information into these utterly heinous crimes appeared in the dock.

Instead the state went into negotiations with the church authorities about setting up a Commission of Enquiry into the disgustingly unsavoury affair and the church authorities - presumably the cardinal and the bishops - agreed to co-operate with the Enquiry on the basis of an undertaking from the State that it (the church authorities) would not have to reveal the identity of its miscreants and that the Church's liability for financial compensation to victims should be capped at some 128 million euro. This latter is currently estimated at 1.3 billion euros which leaves the Irish taxpayer liable for some one billion euros for the crimes of the clergy.

The Ryan Commission heard evidence from literally thousands of victims into rape, buggery and brutality in Catholic institutions where children and young people had been placed by the State for care and protection over a period of some four decades. The Enquiry took ten years and its conclusion was that these utterly depraved practices were 'endemic' in such institutions.

It is hard to imagine the magnitude of suffering inflicted on children of all ages over decades by brutal priests and nuns numerous permeated into a grossly arrogant and sanctimonious church whose maintained code of silence must surely have equalled the evil of its utterly debauched clerics.

There is no suggestion that the church promoted or encouraged this depravity but it must be obvious that the offenders, especially paedophiles, recognised the opportunities the Church with its regime of power and unquestioned obedience offered for the pursuit of their foul practices.

The guilt of the Church was, and is, in the appalling fact that in order to preserve its awesome power over its credulous membership it was prepared to protect those engaged in the most vile practices against children. Those who rape, sodomise, and physically abuse



Businessmen and opera-dancers

The July monthly newsletter of our comrades of the Socialist Party of Canada drew attention to a claim about Adam Smith by *Toronto Star* columnist Thomas Walkom:

"Smith argued that only labour (by which he meant entrepreneurial businessmen) created value and that government and its hangers-on added nothing" (6 June) (www.thestar.com/article/645833).

It is true that Adam Smith did argue that governments and their hangers-on did not create any new value but were maintained out of the value of those who did. It is not true, however, that he thought that only the labour of entrepreneurial businessmen created value.

He deals with this question in Chapter III of Book II of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776):

"There is one sort of labour which adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed: there is another which has no such effect. The former, as it produces a value, may be called productive; the latter, unproductive labour. Thus the labour of a manufacturer adds, generally, to the value of the materials which he works upon, that of his own maintenance, and of his master's profit. The labour of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing. Though the manufacturer has his wages advanced to him by his master, he, in reality, costs him no expense, the value of those wages being generally restored, together with a profit, in the improved value of the subject upon which his labour is bestowed. But the maintenance of a menial servant never is restored. A man grows rich by employing a multitude of manufacturers: he grows poor by maintaining a multitude of menial servants."

This is clear enough. Only those who manufacture (in the original, literal sense of someone who makes something with their hands, *manus* being the Latin word for hand) something tangible and lasting, that can be exchanged for something with the same labour content, create value. This does not include the "masters". Smith explicitly says that they get rich from the value created by the "manufacturers" they employ.

Smith's concept of productive labour could even be called "workerist" in that it has to be manual labour that produces a tangible, a material, object. Even Marx didn't go that far as he counted the non-manual work of designing and planning manual work as productive.

Smith went on:

"The labour of some of the most respectable orders in the society is, like that of menial servants, unproductive of any value, and does not fix or realize itself in any permanent subject; or vendible commodity, which endures after that labour is past, and for which an equal quantity of labour could afterwards be procured. The sovereign, for example, with all the officers both of justice and war who serve under him, the whole army and navy, are unproductive labourers. They are the servants of the public, and are maintained by a part of the annual produce of the industry of other people. (...). In the same class must be ranked, some both of the gravest and most important, and some of the most frivolous professions: churchmen, lawyers, physicians, men of letters of all kinds; players, buffoons, musicians, opera-singers, opera-dancers, etc."

Smith certainly saw the economic role of "masters" as essential but not because he thought they alone created value while government employees, buffoons and opera-dancers merely consumed it. It was because he thought that private enterprise, *laissez-faire* capitalism was the most natural way to organise the production and distribution of wealth. But it isn't. So entrepreneurial businessmen are not needed.

defenceless children have deep and intractable problems; this writer does not pretend to understand the causes of such behaviour but assumes their mental condition is a factor in their guilt. There is no such subtlety in the behaviour of an organisation that conceals such depravity in order to preserve its power and privilege.

RICHARD MONTAGUE

Capitalism is bad for your health

Today the promotion and maintenance of good health and the treatment and cure of ill people is divided among three sectors: private, public and voluntary. The motivating concept in the private sector is pursuit of profit for the providers. The public sector aims primarily to provide goods and services for the consuming public, usually with state or other subsidy. The voluntary sector is the least money-oriented of the three; it is concerned with helping people to help others and themselves.

To some extent the three sectors compete and even conflict with each other. People in urgent need of a serious operation ponder whether they can afford to “go private” quickly or have to join a lengthy NHS waiting list. Can those with extensive work and domestic responsibilities find the time to volunteer in the same way? (In fact one in six people in Britain do volunteer work of one kind or another.)

The three sectors also work together to form the health part of the capitalist system. Public-private partnerships have grown within the welfare state. Paid organisers and administrative staff help to run part of the “voluntary” sector, in effect employing unpaid labour.

All three sectors are concerned in different ways with the meeting of human need. The private sector uses capital and labour to meet needs that are expressed in economic terms and with the expectation of profit for the providers: “We’ll try to keep you well and treat you if you’re not, but only if you pay the market price for this.” The public sector is more concerned with meeting the needs of the system than of people: “If you can’t pay you can wait for free or cheap treatment because the economy needs fit workers, not unproductive ones.” The voluntary sector focuses on meeting human needs, but it does so to help keep the system going: “You are a good citizen if you volunteer—give free labour—to meet the health needs of others.”

Capitalism puts a price on everything, including human life. The nice (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) people in the NHS reckon that £30,000 is the maximum price to pay for a year’s drug treatment if you’ve got terminal cancer. There is a profitable (to shareholders) insurance industry that has a tariff of payouts for various injuries and health losses.

Capitalism is bad for your health, especially if you are a worker. In employment you are likely to be worried about the consequences of losing it or struggling to find the money to pay all the bills. The use of antidepressants is widespread, particularly among the unemployed. Four in ten people on invalidity benefit are now off work because of mental illness—

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twice as many as in the 1980s. “Presenteeism”—turning up for work ill—is also on the increase.

Cheap fatty food leads to problems of obesity, while ill old people who lack care are undernourished. Addiction to medicines and alcohol is encouraged by the profit-seeking providers, marketing firms re-brand foods rich in antioxidants as “superfoods”, but these may do more harm than good. Wars in which no working-class interest is at stake benefit the elite in the war industry, but kill, maim and cause mental illness to the armed forces and civilians.

Healthier socialism

What can we say about the likely effects on health and illness of future socialist society? It is easier to foresee what won’t happen than what will. The promotion of good health and the care of the injured and sick won’t be restricted by money considerations. There will be no profit to be made out of employing people in dangerous occupations, supplying them with unhealthy substances or encouraging their harmful addictions. No sales-people will advertise items and services that at best have no good effect on health and at worst damage it. Health and injury insurance and the compensation industry won’t be necessary.

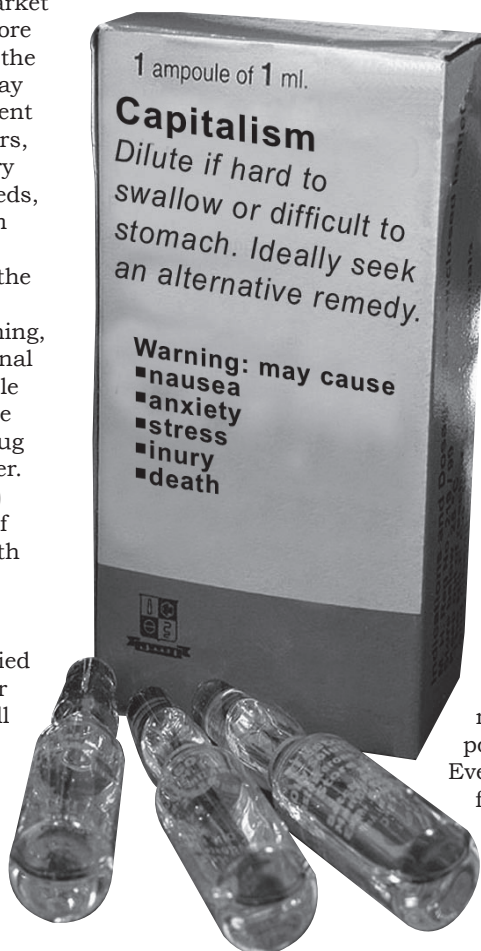
The types and incidence of health problems are likely to differ in the early stage of socialism from later stages when the legacy from the money system will have receded. Also, some parts of the world today have different degrees of economic development, commonly referred to as under-developed, developing and developed. We don’t know the extent to which present

trends, such as urbanisation and environmental degradation, will continue, accelerate or be reversed.

One thing we can say for certain is that socialism will release us from useless and harmful capitalist employment. We shall be free to take up work that will meet the needs of ourselves, others and the community, society and world in which we live. This is not to say that there won’t be problems to overcome. Natural disasters and pandemics won’t end with capitalism, although more effort will doubtless be devoted to avoiding and coping with them.

The recruitment, training and deployment of committed volunteers will take much organising and administration. The emphasis will be on activities and tasks rather than on occupational labels: nursing, brain surgery, portering, scientific research, and so on, rather than nurses, brain surgeons, porters, scientific researchers. Everywhere we shall treat each other as friendly co-operators, not competing commodities.

STAN PARKER



Can we rely on technology to bring down capitalism?

Capital, science fiction and labour



Robots in fiction

Near-future science fiction frequently explores the possibilities of imminent technologies – gadgets that haven't been designed yet, but could be given recent real advances in technology and design. Whilst its track record on such predictions – such as us getting to Mars by 1977 and everyone having rocket cars by 2002 – have been a bit wide of the mark, others have been much closer and in fact actively conservative compared to the real historical record.

Authors such as Charles Stross in his *Halting State* or Ken Macleod in his *Night Sessions* explore a future where mobile phone technology linked up to glasses which display information to the wearer can link up with technology like google Earth and GPS systems to tell them, just by looking, who lives in a house and what criminal records they have and

other known details. They explore the expanding pace of technology, as the machine intelligence of computers begins to exceed that of the living human beings. Iain M. Banks in his *Culture* novels explores the aftereffects of that process, where humans served by loyal robots live in a post-scarcity, anarcho-communist, space-faring society.

A tool enables a human to do a job, while a machine effectively replaces human labour. A robot is a sort of machine. The word itself is Czech, coming from a play about automatons, and it means worker, but with connotations of slavery. The international standards organisation defines a robot as: “an automatically controlled, reprogrammable, multipurpose, manipulator programmable in three or more axes, which may be either fixed in place or mobile for use in industrial automation applications.” In other words, a type of machine.

Robots do not have to be physical, and many expert systems can be described as a robot of sorts. When your word-processor corrects your spelling, that is a type of robot.

Futurists talk of a “singularity”. This represents an “event horizon” in the predictability of human technological development past which present models of the future cease to give reliable or accurate answers, following the creation of strong artificial intelligence or the amplification of human intelligence. Futurists predict that after the Singularity, humans as they exist presently will cease to be the dominating force in scientific and technological progress, replaced with posthumans, strong Artificial Intelligence, or both, and therefore all models of change based on past trends in human behaviour will be obsolete.

The technological singularity refers to a situation in which technological advancement begins to accelerate to the point where new designs are produced, basically, before old ones are implemented: where super-intelligence exists. More prosaically, when the robots begin to be able to do our thinking for us. Proponents of such an eventuality point to growth of computer processing power and the growth of communications and transport technology. They mark how the time taken for products to reach ubiquity and obsolescence is falling – it took 70 years for telephones to become ubiquitous, the iPod has managed it in about 8, for example.

Already 3D printers have been developed that can make models and parts out of silicon and plastic – that will lead to faster development of prototypes. Those 3D printers can also produce 60 percent of their own parts. If they get to 100 percent we'd have multipurpose machines that could reproduce themselves, and maybe even adapt for different tasks.

Drastic effect

Machines making machines. That would have drastic effects on the labour market. Robin Hanson writes in the on-line magazine *IEEE Spectrum*:

“The relative advantages of humans and machines vary from one task to the next. Imagine a chart resembling a topographic cross section, with the tasks that are “most human” forming a human advantage curve on the higher ground. Here you find chores best done by humans, like gourmet cooking or elite hairdressing. Then there is a “shore” consisting of tasks that humans and machines are equally able to perform and, beyond them an “ocean” of tasks best done by machines. When machines get cheaper or smarter or both, the water level rises, as it were, and the shore moves inland.” (“Economics Of The Singularity”, <http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/robotics/robotics-software/economics-of-the-singularity/2>)

Depending on how these contours actually lie, this could mean mass displacement for millions of workers: redundancy on a grand scale. From shop staff to clerks, essentially human posts could be done away with by “simple” intelligences or machine expertise.

Of course, this trend has been continuing since capitalism began. As Hanson notes:

“The (...) proliferation of machine-assembled cars raised the value of related human tasks, such as designing those cars, because the financial stakes were now much higher. Sure enough, automobiles raised the wages of machinists and designers.”

Throughout history, the labour market has had winners and losers, swings as well as roundabouts. New workers have always been recruited to replace those thrown on the scrapheap; but in this scenario, new workers can be designed, trained up and introduced faster through machinery than it would take to breed and train a new generation of humans.



Robots in fact

The suggestion throughout discussion of a technological singularity is that productivity would soar. In essence, it would herald an abundance economy. For some radical “transhumanists” – those who foresee the human body being merged with machines (see p4) – this would mean the end of capitalism.

The capitalist mode of production carries with it a strong impulse for this sort of increasing productivity:

“The battle of competition is fought by cheapening of commodities. The cheapness of commodities depends, *caeteris paribus*, on the productiveness of labour, and this again on the scale of production. Therefore, the larger capitals beat the smaller. It will further be remembered that, with the development of the capitalist mode of production, there is an increase in the minimum amount of individual capital necessary to carry on a business under its normal conditions.”

The result of which is the fact that:

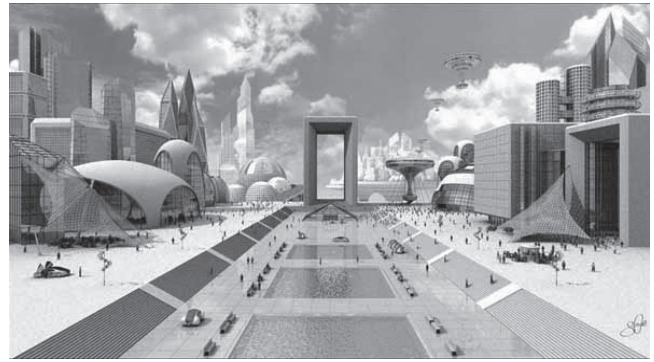
“...the growing extent of the means of production, as compared with the labour-power incorporated with them, is an expression of the growing productiveness of labour. The increase of the latter appears, therefore, in the diminution of the mass of labour in proportion to the mass of means of production moved by it, or in the diminution of the subjective factor of the labour-process as compared with the objective factor.

The additional capitals formed in the normal course of accumulation serve particularly as vehicles for the exploitation of new inventions and discoveries, and industrial improvements in general. But in time the old capital also reaches the moment of renewal from top to toe, when it sheds its skin and is reborn like the others in a perfected technical form, in which a smaller quantity of labour will suffice to set in motion a larger quantity of machinery and raw materials.” (Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, Chapter 25)

In a bind

Capitalism is in a bind – it wants to use as much labour as it can as little as possible. That is, while it, on the one hand, sets its production goals as limitless, an infinity of riches and products, it wants to spare the precious labour that gives it an edge in the competitive battle. This is what the shackles of capital mean to labour – that goals and activities that are within the practical bounds of human endeavour are left unsecured because it is not capitalistically efficient to do so. Capitalism prefers the increasing refinement of the productive process to the actual attainment of any specific outcomes or goods.

This brings us to an important factor. As E. P. Thompson noted in his *The Making of the English Working Class* – the working class made themselves. Workers, and their demands for waged labour as compared with the previous forms of bonded labour, were in the forefront of promoting market relations. Professor Robert Allen of Nuffield College, Oxford, an economic historian, goes so far as to suggest that a significant contributing factor to the Industrial Revolution occurring in Britain was the relatively high (at that time and in the world) real wages of the workers here. Particularly, they were high relative to fuel costs and capital costs. The importance of this is that it incentivised innovation and mechanisation. Similar features have been attributed to American industrialisation. The high costs of labour, and capitalism’s drive to spare labour if



at all possible is a key motor of capital accumulation.

This, then, presents us with a bind. Capitalism spares labour, cuts labour and labour costs, while it grows. Further, as we’ve seen above, whilst it accumulates, it cheapens the products of industry. This presents us with a situation in which fewer people are employed in production, and in which the cost of employing productive labour actually falls. The mass of use values they can command may well increase, but the value of their pay declines. We can see this in the recent history of the United States “Since 1975, practically all the gains in household income have gone to the top 20 percent of households” – that’s from the CIA’s 2005 factbook on the US economy.

Emancipating Labour

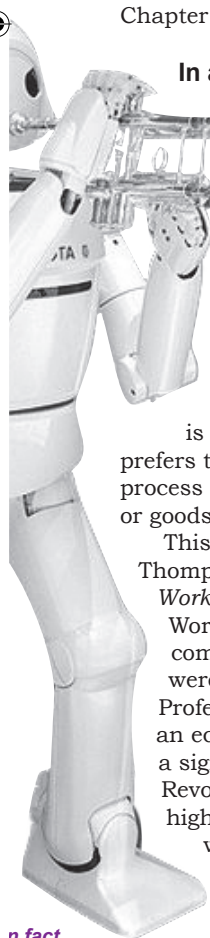
Hanson sees a situation in which we would all have to become capitalists, living off interest, because labour would no longer pay, but if what has been suggested above comes to pass, then we simply wouldn’t have that option, and a form of labour feudalism could emerge.

In response to a questionnaire, when Marx was asked what were his goals, he simply replied “The emancipation of labour.” This brings us to the crux of the matter – technology emancipates us from labour, but so long as a vast swathe of humanity depends on the sale of its ability to work labour will be in the chains of capital. Socialism, the emancipation of labour, would see a situation in which rather than try at all costs to spare labour, we will freely chuck it at problems because we would be working towards definite ends, rather than an ever increasing size of profit.

It would be nice to think that technological progress would simply evolve capitalism away. If we believed that, we could shut up shop and simply become cheerleaders for advancing bleeding-edge technology. The dangers of the alternative, a kind of stagnant capitalism based on cheap superabundant labour unable to fight back, is quite terrifying. We’ve seen how capitalism does have a drive to advance technology, but one that may be undercut by its dependence on waged labour. Waged labour has not been the passive tool of capital, but an active and essential participant in driving capitalism onwards. We as workers cannot sit by and hope that a magic bullet will solve our social problems, and our active organisation remains essential to attaining socialism.

Productive forces encompass more than technological capacity, and include the organisational and mental capacities required for a given form of society. The friction between capital and labour was a source of technological innovation, that friction was a productive force. Socialism will free up labour, irrespective of technological capacity, to use whatever technological powers are available. Socialism is not a by-product of technology but of social consciousness.

PIK SMEET



n fact

The penny drops

The second part of "Then and Now— how we live and how we used to live" look backs from a future time at the changeover to socialism.

Who would have thought that humanity could organise so quickly to do away with the tangled mess that their money-based world had created? The campaign for a world community of equals became a mass movement in seemingly no time at all. Once the idea of abolishing money and sweeping away the fetters associated with it had caught the collective imagination, all notions that human beings were too selfish or stupid to establish a communal world without political leaders very quickly came to be seen as absurd.

The growing dissatisfaction with leaders who had no answer to the environmental and political problems besetting the planet at last gave rise to a general desire to produce solutions rather than simply protest. Campaigners against the individual problems created by capitalism began to realise that its worst excesses could not be got rid of without sweeping it away in its entirety; corruption in political and economic life came to be seen not as a problem in itself but as an inevitable result of a world dominated by the need to make money for the rich and powerful minority. Even many sceptics admitted that the new world being proposed could not possibly be worse than what they had – so why not give it a try?

It became evident that the capitalist class was fast losing its control of the media. Newspaper articles, television programmes, radio and internet discussion forums became increasingly dominated by campaigns for concerted action to sweep away the world of money and governments. Famous people, and even some of the more enlightened world leaders, began to give their support to the movement, willing to use their skills as delegates and spokesmen although realising that their own positions as revered celebrities or political leaders would soon be redundant.

As the global movement grew,

so the need was addressed for global co-ordination, and mechanisms were put into place for bringing in the new world society and taking control of the state machinery from those in power. Given that most state employees, including members of the police and the military, had by this time more or less come over to the socialist cause anyway, resistance and violence in this process were fortunately minimal.

Institutions such as the United Nations, the International Red Cross and national parliaments were adapted for the broader, more democratic requirements of a free world community. There was of course no power-based agenda, nobody with greater voting force than anyone else, no rival economic interests.

Well before any official declaration was made, people had started to do what was needed to begin creating the new world. It's amazing how easily most things fell into place; local life soon became

largely self-administering and wider co-ordination soon ensured that the world's land, factories and natural resources came under full democratic control and started to be utilised as effectively as possible to satisfy needs directly. Local plans were devised to make the best alternative uses of buildings that no longer served their original purpose, such as banks, munitions factories and stately homes.

The first major task was an immediate massive movement of food and other essentials to the areas that needed them, making use of what was left of the old army and police as a core with a not inconsiderable complement of additional helpers. The same was done to ensure that the world's homeless were provided with secure, comfortable housing – a largely logistical exercise, give the abundance of homes that had been kept empty under capitalism. Communities able to grow their own food very quickly became self sufficient: food surpluses were distributed elsewhere to areas of need without any requirement to pass through that asphyxiating intermediary

"Campaigns to keep money sprang up..."



known as the market.

Some people were convinced that the massive changes taking place all around were God's will and continued harmlessly to attend their church services. Not everybody understood or welcomed the move to a new world, however, and some thought it wouldn't last. I would hear people say, "it's free, get it while you can, they'll start charging again soon". In the short term, others took the absence of political leaders or a coercive police force as an excuse to run riot; many of those who had lived a life of violence and crime continued for a time to exhibit disruptive and antisocial behaviour and had to be restrained, in as humane a way as possible, by their local communities.

Campaigns to keep money sprang up, led mainly by diehard capitalists and their supporters suddenly left with no-one to boss and bully; some people even still used money in their own local groups believing it to be a measure of how hard you've worked and hence how much you deserve – something which had never been true in capitalism.

For a time the old "capitalist" lifestyles and habits continued, but without money in the equation. People still talked of going to work, going on their holidays, getting married...and this is what they did. In some quarters, old habits died hard.

Some people chose not to do anything much at all, as far as I could see...perhaps deeply traumatised by the lives they used to lead, and relieved not to have to "earn a living" any more, they were content to live out their days in a state of near vegetation. Fair enough, I said, leave them alone, it's a more than adequate price for the new society to pay, and surely it won't last.

And what of the capitalists themselves, those individuals who had dominated the world of money for so long? Where there was no need to interfere, they were left alone. For the most part, they had been as much trapped by circumstances as the old working class, and most of them, accepting that their time was over, willingly surrendered their factories and estates to the common good and helped to form the new world. Not that they had much choice.

In many ways, these first years were a transitional phase but not in the way Marx visualised it. Within a generation, attitudes and behaviour would be very different.

ROD SHAW

One brick



at a time



CAPITALIST GOVERNMENTS find it useful to get together in various ways, despite the inevitable rivalry between them. It can be helpful to avoid being at loggerheads too much of the time, whether to benefit from some temporary mutual interest or to club together against some country or bloc that is for the time being an enemy. From the United Nations to G8 to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, many capitalist alliances have proven themselves worthwhile to ruling classes.

One of the most recent such groups to emerge is known as BRIC (for Brazil, Russia, India, China). The idea has been around for a few years, but only in June did the first summit of these countries take place. They are currently behind the United States as the uncontroversial leading power, Japan and the European Union (itself a grouping, not a single country, of course). Yet, together these four states account for forty percent of the world's population, and their political and economic influence is only likely to increase. Even in the current recession, their economic growth outstrips that of the rest of the world.

And what kind of thing do the bosses of BRIC talk about when they get round a table? They talk about areas where their countries may be able to work together, such as energy (including nuclear energy), agriculture and technology. They talk about areas where competition and cooperation are both possible (such as between Brazil and Russia in aircraft construction). There is a possible division of labour over the next few decades, with Brazil and Russia becoming major players in the provision of raw materials, and China and India supplying manufactured

goods and services. China's economy is based on manufacturing, with cheap labour power offering an advantage for the time being. India's strength is in information technology, with software being developed for many international companies. Russia has enormous reserves of oil and natural gas, but long-term reliance on high energy prices is not considered to be a sensible strategy. Brazil, in contrast, specialises in agricultural exports, together with producing minerals such as iron and aluminium. So there are plenty of opportunities for cooperation, with Russian oil and gas finding their way to India and China, for instance.

In June the leaders also discussed changing the global currency system, with regional reserve currencies being adopted and some transactions being conducted in national currencies. This could well be bad news for the US, with the role of the dollar as the main reserve currency being undermined. Though China, with huge dollar reserves, wishes to see the US currency maintain its current role. Even if little changes in the short term, it is highly likely that over a longer period there will be considerable reshaping of how capitalism's global finances are structured.

It is not clear whether BRIC will remain as a forum, let alone become a more formalised association. But you can bet your bottom dollar (or yuan or rouble) that the world's power-holders will continue to defend their own interests by cooperating or competing with whoever suits them at the time, with no regard for those who actually produce the wealth or for any concept of democracy.

PAUL BENNETT

Green-lite reformism

Fuelling a Food Crisis – The impact of peak oil on food security.

By Caroline Lucas, Andy Jones and Colin Hines. (www.carolinelucasmep.org.uk/2006/12/08/fuelling-a-food-crisis/).



Current methods of food production and distribution are having a negative effect on the environment. The facts of the case are set out in this report by Green Party

MEP Caroline Lucas and the two others, on behalf of the Green Group in the European Parliament, even though the measures they offer are no more than “green-lite” reforms.

They show that the increased industrialisation of farming, particularly following the end of WW2, means that current methods now consume 50 times the energy input of traditional agriculture and in the most extreme cases “100 fold or more.” “Including energy costs for farm machinery, transportation, processing and feedstocks for agricultural chemicals – the modern food system consumes roughly 10 calories of fossil fuel energy for every calorie of food energy produced.”

The UK has developed an increasing dependence on imported food. Figures from the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) show that between 1988 and 2002 imports in tonnes increased by 38 percent and that 50 percent of all vegetables and 95 percent of all fruit consumed in the UK now come from overseas.

How necessary are these imports for the consumers? The ‘New Economics Foundation’, in its *UK Interdependence Report* for 2006, published a list of food imports and exports, showing a two-way process of similar products travelling in opposite directions being both imports and exports simultaneously: in 2004, UK imported 10.2 million kilos of milk and cream from France – and exported 9.9 million kilos of milk and cream to France. The figures traded between UK and Germany for milk and cream were 15.5 million kilos to and 17.2 million kilos from the UK. UK imported 1.5 million kilos of potatoes from Germany and exported 1.5 million kilos of potatoes to Germany. UK

imported 44,000 tonnes of frozen boneless chicken and exported 51,000 tonnes of fresh boneless chicken (countries not specified). These examples are a tiny fraction of the crazy methods of the globalised food trade which have scant regard for either environmental protection or actual consumers.

A report for DEFRA in 2005 on “The Validity of Food Miles as an Indicator of Sustainable Development” concluded:

“Transport of food by air has the highest CO₂ emissions per tonne and is the fastest growing mode. Although air freight of food accounts for only 1 percent of food tonne kilometres and 0.1 percent of vehicle kilometres it produces 11 percent of the food transport CO₂ equivalent emissions.” (<https://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/reports/foodmiles/final.pdf>)

Whilst the UK imports almost twice as much food as it exports vegetable and fruit imports account for over 60 percent of its food air freight. This is the upside-down world where there are, on the one hand, international agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while, on the other, trade agreements to exchange foods internationally involving unnecessarily flying foodstuffs around the globe, so increasing the emissions.

Food has to be transported but all transportation is at cost to the environment. How it is transported and how far are not decisions about which the consumer is consulted. Individuals could make a difference by the choices they make using their own moral code – providing they are equipped with all the available information – but, like travel, unrestricted flying, expansion of airports etc., individual actions make little impact. Action groups can and do make differences by boycotting certain food outlets or companies to affect their stance on political, humanitarian or moral issues (apartheid South Africa, Nestlé’s infant food formula sold in countries where customers had no access to clean water for mixing it, Fair Trade products) but these successes, whether small or substantial, don’t address the root problem and there’s always the need for yet another campaign.

Also topsy-turvy are the various goals set for using crops as alternative fuels. The authors quote George Monbiot that “It has been calculated that meeting the EU’s target for 20 percent of transport fuel to come from biodiesel by 2020 would consume almost all of Britain’s

croplands.” Presumably, attempting to achieve this target would imply relying even more heavily on imported food with all the associated extra environmental damage, plus the damage to domestic farmland and the environment from growing a monocrop.

Then there is the environmental impact of modern industrial agriculture’s use of fertilisers:

“The manufacture of synthetic fertilisers is particularly energy intensive and accounts for around one third of the UK’s agricultural energy consumption. It has been estimated that 40 percent of world food protein now relies on synthetic nitrogen fertilisers.” “The fourth most traded bulk commodity in world shipping trade after iron ore, coal and cereals is fertilisers and their raw materials.”

Peak oil and natural gas are not seen as a problem for future manufacturing in the fertiliser industry as there are sufficient coal reserves for 200 or so years at current production levels. “The consequences in terms of climate change, however, would be catastrophic. Additionally, production of ammonia from coal is 70 percent more energy intensive than production from natural gas.” Fertilisers are both big business and big polluters. Damage is caused during production, during distribution and to soil and water post-use, upsetting natural soil balance and leaching into water sources.

The authors conclude:

“The mandatory rules of trade that promote the interests of agribusiness, industrial production and long distance transport, and that force countries to compete to produce each other’s food at the expense of domestic production . . . are a disaster for food security, particularly in poorer countries, as subsistence farmers are increasingly put out of business or forced into export production instead.”

As alternatives to this environmentally destructive madness what do they recommend?

“Relocating our food systems will require a complete change of direction, away from the policies of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy and the rules of the World Trade Organisation . . . Instead, the central aim of trade and food policy should be a just and environmentally sound food security programme, for all nations.”

They go on to list some measures (i.e. reforms) that “would be

instrumental in helping to meet the challenge.” For instance, “Production methods would have to meet key environmental and animal welfare standards, as well as provide healthy food . . . the reduction of fossil fuel use would need to be prioritised across the framework.”

Other proposed measures include fair wages and adequate income, national import controls as a prerogative of all countries, reduced profit margins for food processors and supermarkets, restricting the market share of individual supermarkets, promoting self-reliance and ending subsidised dumping, and rewriting the EU Treaty and the rules of the WTO.

The trouble is that each one of these reforms, or something similar, has been promoted, implemented, tried, reworked and discarded in favour of whatever is the latest fad. They are offering palliative treatment when only invasive surgery will do. As for agriculture and the environment, there is plenty of evidence pointing to how to get well and truly onto a sustainable path worldwide. Studies and statistics abound from universities, national and international farming networks, coalitions on food sovereignty, and organic farming which demonstrate that traditional intensive farming methods can out-perform industrial agricultural methods and are more beneficial to the health of both people and the environment. People may desire this change but the economic framework of capitalism won't allow it.

“At a time when water tables are falling, temperatures are rising as a result of climate change and oil supplies will soon be shrinking the need for decisive action could not be more urgent.” Without a doubt. But, whilst the authors set out a wealth of solid information, and display a desire both to improve the lot of worldwide farmers and to ensure enough healthy food for all, their focus throughout their report on the monetary costs of everything – inevitable in a capitalist world – is their downfall for it is this very element that is fuelling both the food and the environmental crises.

JANET SURMAN

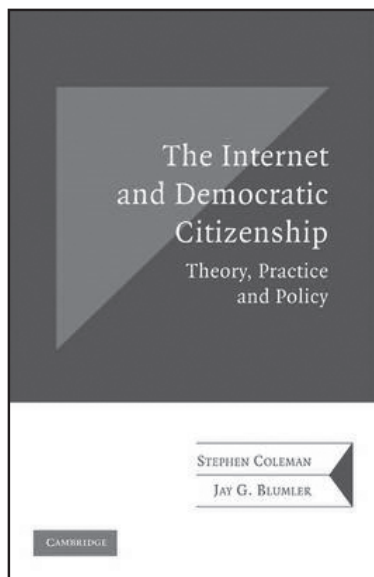


Commonly Civic

The Internet and Democratic Citizenship. By Stephen Coleman and Jay Blumler: Cambridge University Press £14.99.

It is hardly controversial to say that the Internet opens up new possibilities for political discussion and for dissemination of opinions and news. From websites and mailing lists to blogs and videos downloaded from mobile phones, details of events and commentary can be circulated far more quickly and widely than was possible even twenty years ago. In this book, though, former Socialist Party member Steve Coleman and his co-author go much further, arguing that citizens' participation in democracy can be greatly increased by the establishment of what they call a 'civic commons'.

This would not be just a matter of e-voting but of true e-participation. An example of the latter would be the discussion on domestic violence in 2000, whereby a parliamentary committee's sessions were webcast live and an online forum enabled 'the public' to submit evidence. This and similar examples, however, illustrate top-down e-democracy, run by government bodies, which can lead only to a kind of pseudo-participation.



In contrast is e-democracy from below, where people get together to share knowledge and mobilise for action of one kind or another. An example would be netmums, an online group which aims to support mothers locally and provide information, such as the location of toddler groups (see www.netmums.com). The Stop the War coalition is

another instance, with a website as a point of first contact for anyone interested.

Beyond this is the idea of an online civic commons, a democratically-moderated space that is nobody's property (like unenclosed common land in medieval times). A new public agency would gather and coordinate people's views on a range of problems, and public bodies would have to react formally. A hypothetical example is given: a debate on the teaching of reading is initiated by a government minister, and parents, teachers and others contribute via the civic commons, where an online library is established and a series of e-guides produced.

The problem is that there is an unspoken assumption behind all this that capitalism could and should be made more democratic in this way. The authors acknowledge that the Internet is not inherently democratising, but they say far too little about possibilities for democracy under capitalism. The notion of class is entirely missing, and the division into governors and governed is never balanced by anything on owners versus employees. With its vast inequalities of wealth and power, capitalism is inherently undemocratic, and this can at most be only slightly modified by means of a civic commons.

A socialist society might well employ something like a civic commons, and there could still be sites along the lines of netmums. But the Internet has little if any potential for increasing democracy under capitalism.

PB

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Obituary

Paul Hannam

South West Regional Branch regret to have to report that Paul Hannam took his own life at the beginning of July. He was 52. He joined in 1997 and when he worked he was a skilled machinist and member of the AEU. I met first Paul at the National Schizophrenia Fellowship some 15 years ago. He was a generous supporter of both Head Office and more latterly SW Regional Branch, despite being on benefits. Whilst increasing ill health prevented him from attending meetings and he was in and out of St Anne's hospital, his support for socialism never failed. He never threatened to leave the party, remaining steadfast in his quiet support. He leaves his brother, Barry and his girlfriend, Mary. We wish them our deepest condolences.

VC

Meetings

GLASGOW

Wednesday 19 August,
8.30pm
WHY THE SNP MUST
FAIL

Speaker: V.Vanni
Community Central
Halls, 304 Maryhill Road

LONDON

at 52 Clapham High St,
SW4

Saturday 29 August,
7.00pm

MARX, MYTH AND
MONEY
Speaker: Pat Deutz

Sunday 6 September,
6.00pm
"The free election of

masters does not abolish
the masters or the
slaves"
Speaker: Jim Lawrie

Wednesday 16
September, at 7.30pm
"CAPITALISM OR
SOCIALISM?"

Debate against Dr.
Eamonn Butler of the
Adam Smith Institute

Sunday 20th September
at 6.00pm

OUR OWN WORST
ENEMY? - HUMAN
NATURE AND
SOCIALISM

Speaker: Dick Field

WEST LONDON

Tuesday 18 August
Discussion on WORLD
WAR TWO

Opener: Syd Wilcox
Committee Room,
Chiswick Town Hall,
Heathfield Terrace, W4
(nearest tube: Chiswick
Park)

MANCHESTER

Saturday 12 September,
One-day School
1pm - 5pm

"Capitalism and the
Crisis"
Friends' Meeting House
Mount Street
City Centre (next to
Central Library and
Manchester Town Hall)

Mr. Cousins' Damp Squib



The Labour Party is in a turmoil—and the General Election is near. Mr. Cousins of the Transport and General Workers Union has thrown a spanner into the works. He has been making quite a stir in the news by his opposition to the official attitude of the Labour Party on the H-Bomb and nationalisation.

Mr. Bevan has now become quite respectable as an official spokesman. Mr. Cousins has replaced him as the Labour Party rebel—the "leftist." It is only farce that is played out every now and then with only a change in the personnel. Is there really any fundamental difference between Mr. Cousins and the leaders of the Labour Party?

He objects to the H-Bomb but supports the Labour Party, which is pledged to a defence programme. Millions were killed in the last war without the H-Bomb being used, but he does not support the only policy that will end war. He believes Mr. Gaitskill is sincere but that his policy on the H-Bomb will not be effective.

At the Transport and General Workers Conference in the Isle of Man Mr. Cousins dropped his bombshell. He is also reported as follows: "I have never believed that the most important thing in our lives is to elect a

Labour Government. The most important thing is to elect a Labour Government that is determined to carry out Socialist policies." (*Daily Express*, 10th July, 1959.)

Now what does he mean by "to carry out Socialist policies"? To him it means nationalisation—state capitalism. He objects to the official line on nationalisation—buying shares instead of the state taking over the industries. But to him, just as to them, state ownership is equivalent to Socialism. In other words, in spite of the long experience of state capitalism, he blindly accepts it as the fundamental aim, despite the disillusion and unrest in state owned or state controlled concerns and the labour struggles in them for better conditions.

Thus what Mr. Cousins is after will leave the workers just as they are, the wage slave victims of capitalist conditions and subject to the threat of terrible wars, with or without the H-Bomb.

(from front page article by Gilmac, *Socialist Standard*, August 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Jack Straw – getting to know you

You know Jack Straw. The one who always sits on Gordon Brown's right at Prime Ministers Questions. Composed, dapper. Careful hair, expressionless eyes. Unmoved by the rowdy disorder around him. Alone among the servile front benchers working on his papers, jotting down a note or ticking a box. The very image of a Minister of the Crown exuding confidence that after the next election he will be back on that bench – perhaps even the one responding to brickbats from the opposition. It was not always so. Old photographs tell of a different someone – a young student experimenting with a variety of clothes and hair styles, whose eyes swivelled behind thick-framed glasses. Before he apparently took advice from an image consultant to help him up the greasy pole Straw was a student activist to satisfy the most expectant lefty. His 1966 elevation into the chair of the Labour Society at Leeds University was with the support of the Communist Society there. Abruptly he was rewarded by a Foreign Office denunciation as a "...chief troublemaker acting with malice aforethought" for disrupting a student trip to Chile. A couple of years later, by now President of the Student Union, he spear-headed a four day occupation of the university in reprisal for alleged security checks on the students. And again when a passionate speech of his on a conference resolution was apologetically interrupted by the – bewildered – chair reminding him that he was supposed to be speaking for the other side. Which, without so much as a tremor of embarrassment or apology, he did. Yes – you know Jack Straw.

Parliament

You might not know (although you should have had your suspicions) that from his teens Straw nurtured an ambition to be a successful politician, using the name Jack rather than John in salute to the 14th. Century peasant leader. In 1974, after a spell as President of the National Union of Students, he began to work for Social Security Minister Barbara Castle -whose plans to restrict the unions, set out in the infamous *In Place Of Strife*, virtually finished her chances to be Labour's first female leader. Straw was well placed to succeed her in 1979 as MP for the safe seat of Blackburn. Conforming to the principle, popular among Labour MPs, that support for the local football team is essential to maintain a healthy majority, Straw had to wear a scarf and wave a rattle for Blackburn Rovers. Whatever this did for him on the terraces of Eward Park the impression he made in Parliament was uneven; the infinitely nasty Tory MP Alan Clark sneered "I remember 'slapping him down' when I was a junior employment minister and he was a backbench socialist 'trying' to find his way".

But Westminster is no place to be sensitive about such slights. After a string of Shadow posts Straw's place in a future Labour government looked safe when Blair gave him the job he had relinquished when he became party leader - spokesman on Home Office affairs. The plan was that he would carry on where Blair had left off, expunging the impression that a Labour Home Secretary would be soft on crime. Quickly justifying his leader's confidence in him, Straw set about doing what had been assumed to be impossible – promoting the impression that there could be a Home Secretary more authoritarian

and punitive than the detested Tory Michael Howard. To this end, at one time or another, Straw has bellowed out tabloid-attractive policies such as locking up people who have not committed any crime but who may do so because they are classified as suffering from a "personality disorder"; or curfew orders designed to keep under-16 year-olds off the streets; or drives to suppress "aggressive beggars, winos and squeegee merchants". Unsurprisingly, Margaret Thatcher was numbered among his fans: "I trust Jack Straw. He is a very fair man" was how she put it while many others agreed with lawyer Louis Bloom Cooper that he was "...the most reactionary Home Secretary we have had".

Biggs

Ever anxious to still any doubts about him going soft on crime, Straw recently grabbed the headlines by overturning a Parole Board recommendation to release Ronnie Biggs, the last of the Great Train Robbers. The usual reason for such a decision is that the person concerned is likely to be a danger to the public by committing further serious offences. But Biggs is said to be frail and sick, unable to walk or talk or feed himself, which is done through a tube into his stomach. So Straw had to come up with some other justification – that Biggs is "wholly unrepentant" and "outrageously courted the media" about his escape to Brazil.

Well, if we are looking for repentance we might have expected Straw to regret his ready acceptance of the government's lying excuse for attacking Iraq, with all the consequent destruction and killing, for in January 2003 he wrongly asserted that the Blix report "contains the clearest possible evidence that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction...Several thousand rockets are unaccounted for". Does he regret his decision to allow General Pinochet to return to Argentina, although he was wanted elsewhere for trial for thousands of people being tortured and murdered, on the grounds that the dictator was too sick to stand trial? What does he think now about his rejection of an asylum application from an Iraqi man with the advice that "we have faith in the integrity of the Iraqi judicial process and that you should have no concern if you haven't done anything wrong"? And will Alistair Campbell have to flee to Brazil now that Straw has ruled that "outrageously courting the media" constitutes a reason for him to lock you away?

You should get to know Jack Straw, for what he has promised and what he has done and failed to do, for he may soon realise his dream to stand in triumph on the steps of Number Ten proclaiming his pledges and his excuses. Then you should turn and trust yourself to do all that is needed and proper for the world.

IVAN



Biggs - Straw argument



A Clueless Pope

At first glance it might appear that His Holiness is getting bang up to date and having a go at the capitalist system, but on closer examination it is no such thing. "Pope Benedict XVI on Tuesday condemned the 'grave deviations and failures' of capitalism exposed by the financial crisis and issued a strong call for a 'true world political authority' to oversee a return to ethics in the global economy. The pontiff's call for stronger government regulation was made in his third and eagerly awaited encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, which the Vatican chose to issue on the eve of the G8 summit of rich nations being held in Italy." (*Financial Times*, 7 July) What kind of fairy tale society does he live in when he talks about "a return to ethics in the global economy"? Capitalism is a society based on class ownership, exploitation and the profit motive.



To talk of ethics in such a society is nonsensical and "government regulation" is powerless to deal with the slump and boom cycle of capitalism. The Holy Father should abandon his foray into political economy and stick to what he does best - scaring the shit out of believers and passing the collection plate.

This Sporting Life

Capitalism corrupts everything it touches. In this society the cash nexus is everything. Sport may be defined in dictionaries as "pleasant pastime, amusement, diversion" but

in modern society it is just another business. Sport, of course, is all about the glory of winning and (if you are British) the nobility of defeat. Oh no it's not. It's all about the money. Which is why, Max Duthie, of Bird & Bird, says: "In almost every major sport today there are tensions between the regulatory bodies on the one side and the players or the teams on the other - and normally the argument is over money." Patrick Wheeler, of Collyer Bristow, says that "there are four key areas of law that come into play in a sports dispute: intellectual property, contract, competition and regulation." (*Times*, 25 June) Not so much an arena for sporting types more a fertile field for lawyers and accountants.

A BNP Submarine?

The success of the British National Party at the recent European elections surprised many. Their success was put down by some as due to their new more "moderate" policies. How "moderate" they have become can be gauged by the following. "Boats carrying illegal migrants to Europe should be sunk, Nick Griffin, the leader of the British National party, said yesterday. In a provocative intervention, Griffin, elected to the European parliament last month, called on the EU to introduce "very tough" measures to prevent illegal migrants entering Europe from Africa. "If there's measures to set up some kind of force or to help, say the Italians, set up a force which actually blocks the Mediterranean then we'd support that," Griffin told BBC Parliament's *The Record Europe*. "But the only measure, sooner or later, which is going to stop immigration and stop large numbers of sub-Saharan Africans dying on the way to get over here is to get very tough with those coming over. Frankly, they

need to sink several of those boats." (*Guardian*, 9 July) Nick Griffin as a U-Boat commander is the sort of fantasy that must appeal to the crazed nationalism of some of the BNP membership.

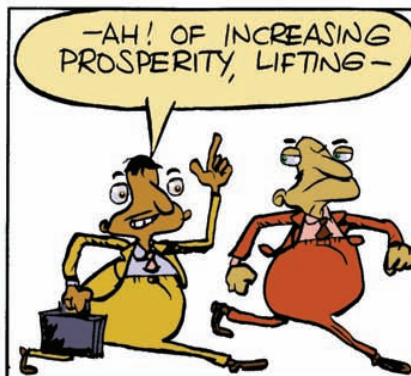


A Billion Reasons For Socialism

"One billion people throughout the world suffer from hunger, a figure which has increased by 100 million because of the global financial crisis, says the UN. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said the figure was a record high. Persistently high food prices have also contributed to the hunger crisis. The director general of the FAO said the level of hunger, one-sixth of the world's population, posed a 'serious risk' to world peace and security. The UN said almost all of the world's undernourished live in developing countries, with the most, some 642 million people, living in the Asia-Pacific region." (*BBC News*, 20 June) We live in a society that destroys food to keep up prices while people die of starvation. Never mind the statistics, a kid is dying today because of the profit motive. Get up off your knees and organise for a world based on production solely for use. We owe it to the world's children.

Free Lunch

by Rigg



socialist standard



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**“And I can’t help but wonder now, Willie McBride,
Do all those who lie here know why they died?”**

No Man’s Land, Eric Bogle



Marine Le Pen
page 6



Harry Patch
page 15



Alan Milburn
page 23



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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 5 September** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
tel: 020 7622 3811
e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Capitalism and the two world wars

The two world wars that disgraced human history in the 20th century were essentially wars to change or preserve an existing carve-up of the world between the leading capitalist states.

In the first world war Imperial Germany attempted to upset, by force of arms, the then existing imperialist division of the world which benefited in particular Britain and France. The second world war too – which broke out seventy years ago this month – was the result of Germany and Japan throwing off unfavourable treaties, territorial divisions and trading arrangements imposed by Britain, France and the United States. From this, historical perspective, it was a continuation of the first world war

In such wars it is the challenging powers that have to take the initiative and so appear as the “aggressors”, but only those completely taken in by the propaganda of the victorious powers (and of course the winners also win the right to impose their version of history) will believe that it was just Germany that was responsible for the first and second world wars. An objective examination of the situation shows that, apart from their “business war” aspects (over markets, raw materials and investment outlets), the two world wars were wars (on the one side) to try to change the existing imperialist carve-up of the world and (on the other side) to preserve it. What was responsible for these wars was the whole world system of capitalism with its competitive struggle for profits and its collection of competing armed states. No one state, or politician, or people can be blamed for them; they were the result of the

“normal” functioning of the capitalist world system.

As socialism had been historically possible since the end of the 19th century humanity could have avoided them. Neither of them justified “the shedding of a single drop of working class blood”, as we declared in our anti-war manifesto in 1914, or as Harry Patch, one of the last survivors to have fought in that war, who died in July, put it, it was “not worth one death let alone all the millions”.

The “War to end all wars” did no such thing. Nor did its even bloodier sequel, World War N° 2, which resulted in the division of the world into two imperialist spheres of influence, the US sphere and the Russian sphere, with a continuous series of local wars at the boundaries between the two, which lasted until the collapse of the Russian Empire twenty years ago this autumn. This collapse was hailed “the end of history” and there was talk of a “peace dividend”. Tony Blair of all people even declared shortly after becoming Prime Minister in May 1997: “Mine is the first generation able to contemplate the possibility that we may live our entire lives without going to war or sending our children to war”. Empty rhetoric from a capitalist politician who was later to send British troops to kill and be killed in Iraq and Afghanistan to protect oil supplies and prevent another challenge to the powers currently dominating the world.

There will be wars, the threat of wars and the waste of preparing for wars as long as capitalism lasts. The only end to war is the end of capitalism – the socialist revolution.



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Euthanasia? Line on the left, one needle each...

It's not often that nature obligingly weighs right into a political row to decide the matter within a month or so, but in the wake of the recent anti-NHS row across the Pond it might do just that. As you will recall, the usual internecine sniping between workers, managers and policy-makers within the British NHS was suspended as the country went into a collective fit of the conniptions over the defamation being perpetrated in the American press.

According to the rabid opponents of Obama's modest health-care reform bill, we in Britain have enforced euthanasia and face 'death panels' of officials who decide which of us get to live. You wouldn't think even redneck republicans would buy this, but their own political bosses obviously think otherwise, and they're the ones with their fingers on the arrested pulse of American political consciousness.

It's not cricket, is it? We can slag off the Health Service all we like, after all it's the national sport. But do it on American TV, as self-promoting neocon-licking uberturd Daniel Hannan MEP did, and out comes the Dunkirk spirit and a flurry of statistics to show why a), the NHS kicks America's butt over every Key Performance Indicator, b), 47 million Americans with no health insurance would rather live over here and c), Daniel Hannan should present himself before the next available death panel.

Everybody, calm down. Just wait and see. Swine flu is back this month, so it won't be long before we'll have hard evidence about which health system copes best, or least worst. The word on the wards is not optimistic, though, judging from a recent poll of health experts of whom over half 'seriously doubted that their health authorities would be able to cope' if the virus became more virulent, as is widely expected (*New Scientist* editorial, 15 August). Half, too, had 'stashed away their own antivirals', even though Tamiflu and Relenza are not likely to do much good for adults and none at all in children under the age of twelve (*New Scientist*, p 4).

Not to be accused of pessimism, Pathfinders would like to offer its own handy list of flu-busting tips for worried readers everywhere. First, lay in a stock of food and don't go out for five months. Alternatively, remove yourself to the Seychelles for the winter. Keep large reserves of water, wood, coal and gold for barter in case society breaks down altogether. Always have a large well-armed staff at your disposal to run errands and catch diseases on your behalf. And of course, have your own doctor, preferably married into the family, with access to the best private hospital your banker's bonuses can buy.

Well, that's the owning class taken care of, which is the main thing. For the rest of us, well, let's keep things in perspective. A big die-off will create a labour shortage and that will raise wages and foster strength and unity among what's left of the unions.

No more worries about unemployment and recession – or euthanasia.

Meanwhile Daniel Hannan has been 'rebuked' by David Cameron, and many are expecting the disloyal swine to be flushed down the Tory Party's private Swine Flue for being so off-message. Of course, Hannan was only saying what many in the Gentlemen's Gestapo privately believe, which is that the Health Service is a giant drain on corporate profits at a time when workers are ten a penny. The American ruling class also know this, which is why they're keen to tell the American proles that the British euthanise all their old people by leaving them out for the vultures, and pack their sick babies into Soylent Green factories.

Bang goes the science media

Ben Goldacre at the *Guardian* must be wondering if his *Bad Science* column is turning into Bad Business, when science journos are being laid off from papers all round the globe as part of a 'dumb down and ditch it' campaign to cut staff costs and gloss up the lowest common denominator sections that require the least thinking. Newspapers are in terminal decline due to the internet, and in the Balloon game that editors are playing, the boffin-hacks are getting tipped over the side first. Of course, they all go online and start blogs, but then they're in competition with a million other blogs touting all brands of 'science' from creationism to alien telepathy – and losing. In the 'Best Science Blog' section of the 2008 Weblog Awards, Pharyngula, an anti-religion sceptic's site, lost first place to a climate-change denial blog ('Unpopular science', *The Nation*, 29 July).

Is science really so unpopular? The BBC seems to think so. Its new science programme, *Bang Goes the Theory*, tries ever-so-hard to be cool, with three young presenters prowling a loud CBeebies-like studio set and conducting experiments carefully selected for their 'wow' factor. The breathless pace effectively rules out any real depth, and the hook appears to be not the science itself, as in *Horizon* or dear old long-lamented *Tomorrow's World*, but whether the presenter is going to get seriously injured. If you're in your teens you'll feel too old for this show.

Meanwhile in recognition of the fact that many scientific breakthroughs have initially been knocked back, a new open-source academic journal called *Rejecta Mathematica* has gone online, consisting of papers rejected by peer-review ('Huddled Maths', *Economist*, 29 July). Let us be the first to recommend to the BBC their next piece of prime-time fluff: *Science – The Out-Takes*.

Competition for the Twittering Classes

The latest fad for micro-blogging is coming under fire, with a study showing that 40 percent of 'tweets' are 'pointless babble' and only 8.7 percent pass along 'news of interest' (*BBC Online*, 17 August). Considering the gargantua of garbage which is the printed book output, this is not a bad batting average. However, keen as ever to raise the bar of public discourse, Pathfinders proposes a competition for the best expression of the Party Case in 140 characters or less. Brief reflection offers: 'World for the Workers, not the Rich W**kers' however you are sure to do better than that. Emails or letters to our Clapham office. Closing date 10 November, for our December issue, and best ideas will be printed. First Prize will be, of course, comradely adulation, as we socialists are trying to move away from material remuneration systems.

twitLess?

Stalinist?

Dear Editors

Truth is (August *Socialist Standard*) that we paid our staff more than our competitors in the newspapers and even included BUPA. The unions, when we were negotiating, said we could go on with the BUPA, but mustn't mention it. Never quite understood what they stood for when their officials drove off in Jaguar XJS', etc.

As far as the 'sharecropping' goes, there is a shortage of allotments in the area and we were trying to free up some of our land near the hotel to fill that local gap. It was a win-win situation.

Nothing more - but if it's a move against the workers of the world...then fine. I think the reason socialism continually fails is because the greed of the political and bureaucratic classes and their lack of efficiency and vision is a stronger deterrent to the common man than the greed of bankers, lawyers and the rest of those who dip their snouts in the working man's taxpayer trough. We can at least get rid of these guys eventually, because that's how capitalism works. And working man is mostly middle-class now, anyway.

For socialism read Stalinism. Read subjugation. Read gulags and firing squads and torture of your own people. Oh happy days.

Eddy Shah (by email)

Reply: Just because we use the words "capitalism", "socialism", and "exploitation" doesn't mean that we therefore supported Stalin's Russia. We didn't (and we didn't support Lenin's Russia either). There was exploitation there too under a system of state capitalism. It was never socialist. We'd have thought that an employer who wanted to run his business without trade union interference could more justly be likened to Stalinism. After all, there were no trade unions in the USSR either - **Editors**.

Corruption

Dear Editors

It's hardly "political rocket science" to understand the decay and corruption that lies at the heart of New Labour as affirmed by yet another dismal by-election defeat for Labour in Norwich North.

Throughout the coverage of this by-election some mainstream political commentators lampooned former

Labour MP Dr Ian Gibson (whose resignation sparked this contest) as a maverick left wing politician, thus implying there was some justification for the New Labour "star chamber" to deselect him over the second home allowance scandal.

Maybe if there actually were more left-wing MP's or prospective parliamentary candidates selected democratically by their local parties and who are periodically adjudged by their local party members on how they stand up for the basic principles their party stands for, then not only would these commentators have had something politically tangible to commentate about but more essentially the new Tory MP Chloe Smith might have had to face a genuine political contest based on policies and ideology rather than personalities and scandals.

Whilst this by-election campaign enticed Tory leader David Cameron to visit Norwich North on six occasions and to predictably hail his victor as a "rising star", her victory was in fact, as indeed all Tory poll successes are, wholly attributable to the failed free market economic policies of New Labour which are the normal mainstay of the Tory Party itself. Apart from Tory core voters who'd vote Tory under any circumstance, the fact that many floating voters in Norwich North voted Tory during a recession underlines how utterly skewed British political attitudes and opinions have become due to this bipartisan political climate that deludes millions of apathetic voters into thinking that they have a legitimate choice.

Yet in essence Dr Gibson is no maverick and he certainly wasn't a radical left wing MP. What

proved too much for New Labour's "star chamber" is that he, along with a handful of other Labour backbenchers on occasions, was mildly critical of New Labour's right-wing free market agenda. Because the majority of Labour MP's today just poodle along passively from day to day far more concerned about their careers and expenses rather than the wellbeing of society in general, then the likes of Dr Gibson are labelled mavericks, hence easily held up as scapegoats for the MP expense scandal.

At least Dr Gibson was right to resign immediately if only to expose how the treatment meted out to him exposes how the New Labour leadership has undermined internal Labour Party democracy all along and how, barring a miracle it's going to result in a future Tory government. The real question however is why these very same commentators within the alleged free press and media totally ignored the fact that the behaviour of Dr Gibson, albeit an alleged 'lefty' who should have never have accepted the second home allowance in the first place, was relatively quite trivial in comparison with the behaviour of Chancellor Alistair Darling or employment minister Tony McNulty. A greasy pole indeed!

NICK VINEHILL, Snettisham, Norfolk

Reply: Of course it wouldn't make any difference if all Labour and Tory MPs were honest and democratically selected. They still wouldn't be able to make the capitalist system work in the interest of the majority class of wage and salary workers - **Editors**.

Party News

Tolpuddle 2009

In July we had the Tolpuddle Rally in sunny Dorset. Tolpuddle is little village near Dorchester, where, in days gone by, six agricultural labourers were transported to Australia for having the temerity to organise a union to protect their wages. Different unions still turn out today to commemorate the beginning of the trade union movement, under the auspices of the TUC. The Socialist Party has been attending for a good thirty years or more and this year's was great, as the weather was very kind to us, not raining, not too hot.

Various comrades and sympathisers turned out to ensure a successful weekend of selling, to the tune of £59 literature and £56 for promotional

goods. We gave away dozens of Socialist balloons to (usually) happy and grateful children - and dozens of leaflets to their parents! The parade was bigger than ever. Billy Bragg sang songs, there were stalls aplenty and thousands of people. One comrade suggested we should have a socialist camp next year with a banner.

Although there were some doubts that we would be able to manage two stalls as we put lots of free back issues of the Standard on one of the stalls and by the end of the weekend, most of them had gone, so this 'freebie' stall actually worked really well. All in all, a pleasant, good natured rally that everyone enjoyed and a valuable outlet for our ideas - we hope to see even more comrades and friends there next year. V.C.



March of the far right

In many parts of Europe far-right populist, as well as fascist and neo-Nazi political parties, have increased their support in local, national and European elections recently (though not everywhere, not in Poland for instance).

In many areas hundreds of thousands of workers have voted, not for socialism, as the economic crisis and downturn of international capitalism deepens, but for localism, nationalism and racist policies. What has happened in part of northern England, has likewise been mirrored in northeast France—the British National Party in England and the Front National in France. An extreme example of the trend was the municipal by-election in June and July in Hénin-Beaumont.

Poverty and Corruption

Hénin-Beaumont, just north of Arras and half-way between Lens and Douai in the Pas-de-Calais, is a former mining town with a population of 27,000; and in the words of Jason Burke, “one of the poorest parts of France, a wasteland of red-brick terrace homes, crumbling blocks of public housing, half-deserted industrial estates and vast fields of wheat bisected by six-lane motorways taking holiday-makers elsewhere” (*Observer*, 5 July).

Although a recent film, “Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis” (“Welcome amongst the Ch’tis”, the popular name for people from this part of France), about a postal worker sent there from the south of the country, which I saw (in western France), popularised the locals, it made no difference to the unemployment, now officially 20 percent, alcoholism (mostly cheap beer), drug abuse and domestic violence; and with the lowest levels of education in the country.

As in many areas of Britain, with the Labour Party, this part of France, including Hénin-Beaumont, was a long-time fiefdom of the reformist Parti Socialiste, which has become thoroughly corrupt, subject to cronyism and patronage. The PS, running the municipal council for almost 60 years, is split into a number of allegedly left and right factions; and the mayor is in jail, charged with corruption, fiddling expenses and local taxes, resulting in cuts in the municipal budget. It can’t get much worse.

Enter the Front National

For the first time in recent years the FN decided to field a candidate, for the municipal authority. The party’s local candidate Steeve Briois hoped—probably expected—to become mayor, reversing a general decline since 2002. Marine Le Pen, the 40-year-old daughter of the FN leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, canvassed the area, popularising the slogan “France for the French” (shades of Gordon Brown’s “British jobs for British

workers,” supported by the BNP), and claiming to be the natural inheritors of working-class politics in France. Since 1990 the FN has in fact increased its influence and support within the working class by beating the nationalist drum and playing the anti-Islam card.

Like the BNP, Marine Le Pen and her supporters, have tended to soften (but not abandon) the FN’s anti-immigration language, and tone down its racism and anti-semitism. She promotes a populist, “Strasserite”, image rather than her father’s former neo-Nazi views (see the *Socialist Standard*, February and March, 1993).

In the first round of the Hénin-Beaumont election the Front National polled just under 40 percent, more than double that of any other candidate. Briois assumed his mayoralty was “in the bag”. Unfortunately for him, however, the left and right formed an alliance, and collectively polled 52 percent in a 62 percent turnout, thus squeezing the FN out.

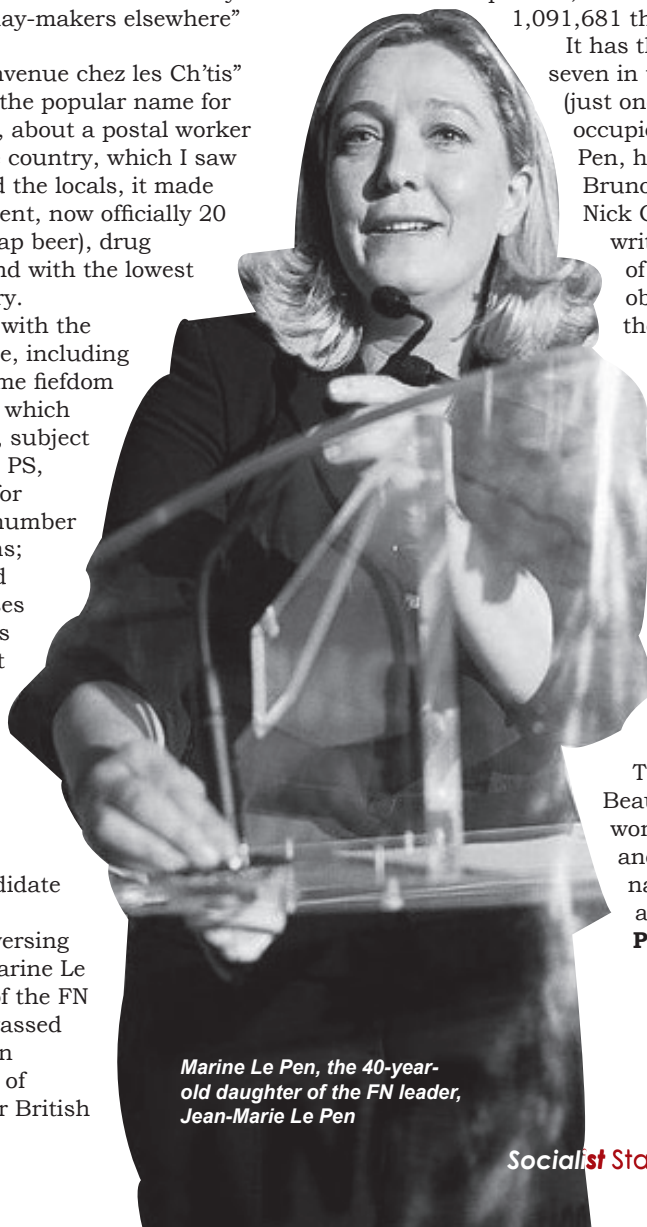
Europe

The Front National did not fare particularly well in this year’s European elections either. It won just 6.3 percent, down from 1,684,792 in 2004 to 1,091,681 this year in a low poll.

It has three seats, down from seven in the last Parliament (just one more than the BNP), occupied by Jean-Marie Le Pen, his daughter, Marine, and Bruno Gollnisch, a friend of Nick Griffin. Jean-Yves Camus, writing in the July number of *International Searchlight*, observes: “The result leaves the FN weaker than before, but not yet dead. It was notably ahead of the two parties of the alternative left, the New Anti-Capitalist Party and the Left Front”.

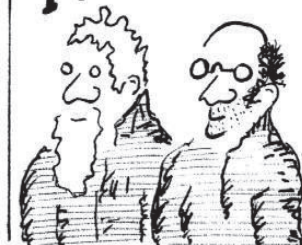
The Front National in France, like the British National Party, has nothing to offer the working class, but the same old worn-out reformist policies and slogans that have failed, time and time again. The workers of Hénin-Beaumont, France, Britain and worldwide, will have to look, and act, beyond the petty nationalisms of such parties and politicians.

PETER E. NEWELL



Marine Le Pen, the 40-year-old daughter of the FN leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen

IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



IN THIS STRIP, WE'LL BE TACKLING THE THORNY ISSUE OF POST MODERN CULTURAL RELATIVISM.

DO WE HAVE TO?

WELL, YEP... WE HAVE TO ASK, WAS THAT WHOLE POST ENLIGHTENMENT SECULAR SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW PURELY A WESTERN CONSTRUCT? MAYBE IT MEANS LITTLE TO OTHER CULTURES.



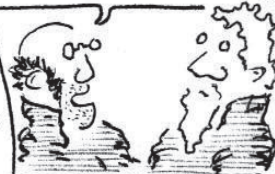
AND WE'RE ON DANGEROUS GROUND HERE. IS EXPORTING, INDEED IMPOSING WESTERN IDEALS LIKE DEMOCRACY, FREE SPEECH, TO OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD A FORM OF IMPERIALISM? 'MUSCULAR LIBERALISM' AS THEY CALL IT, SURELY A BIT OF A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS..



THINK OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION IN 1979... A REACTION AGAINST WESTERN SECULAR MODERNITY. IN A COLD WAR WORLD, EVERYTHING WAS RATHER SIMPLISTICALLY JUDGED IN LEFT / RIGHT TERMS. IRAN CONFUSED PEOPLE.



WE HERE IN EUROPE ARE VERY PROUD OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT, BUT WHAT ABOUT ELSEWHERE? OH, THE REST OF THE WORLD MODERNIZED, INDUSTRIALIZED, JAPAN BEING THE PRIME EXAMPLE, BUT, THINK OF TWO YOUNG MEN... GANDHI AND BIN LADEN... BOTH WESTERN ATTIRED YOUTHS, WHO DECISIVELY REJECTED THE WEST, DISCOVERING A NEW IDENTITY THROUGH ANCIENT RELIGION AND CULTURE.



AND REMEMBER THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR? PEOPLE BURNING BOOKS THEY'D NEVER READ IN THE STREET, AND LIBERALS CRINGING... NOT SO MUCH SITTING ON THE FENCE AS STICKING HEADS IN THE SAND.



I SUPPOSE THE IDEA NOW IS THAT ALL CULTURES ARE EQUALLY DESERVING OF RESPECT, - A NOBLE ENOUGH AIM, CERTAINLY. BIT GALLING TO HAVE TO TAKE SERIOUSLY WHAT IS BASICALLY MEDIEVAL SUPERSTITION, THOUGH.



SO WHAT ABOUT THE LEFT? MARX'S WORLDVIEW WAS TOTALLY EUROCENTRIC, A PRODUCT OF THE AGE HE LIVED IN. WHAT ABOUT A PRE-ENLIGHTENMENT LEFT? WELL, WE HAVE THE LEVELLERS, THE DIKKERS, BACK IN THE 1640'S... BUT RELIGION WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO THEM. IT'S DIFFICULT FOR US TO GET BACK INTO THEIR MINDSET. EVEN HARDER TO GET BACK INTO THE MINDSET OF SPARTACUS, - PRAISED BY MARX!



BUT IT MUST BE SAID, THE DISPOSSESSED PEOPLES OF THE WORLD HAVE LITTLE ENOUGH - JUST THEIR CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS IDENTITY, A DEFENCE AGAINST THE ALIENATION THAT CAPITALISM BRINGS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES. WE ARN'T JUST YOUR PLIABLE CONSUMERS!



HEY, YOUSE! AH DEMAND YE RESPECT MA CULTURE... OF MOROSE ALCOHOLISM!

YEAH! WE CAN GO WITH THAT!



AND MAYBE IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT MAYBE DIFFERENT VIEWS OF REALITY ARE EQUALLY VALID. TO A POINT. I STILL FEEL THE WESTERN SCIENTIFIC POST ENLIGHTENMENT PROJECT DID REVEAL SOME REAL, ABSOLUTE TRUTHS ABOUT THE UNIVERSE, THE HUMAN CONDITION, AND SOCIALISM IS, ULTIMATELY, A SECULAR, RATIONAL, PRODUCT OF THAT. WITH A TRULY UNIVERSAL MESSAGE.





ONE TO MISS

"His birth was marked by a double rainbow and a new star, he hit 11 holes-in-one in his first game of golf, finishing 38 under par, and throughout his life he has performed heroic feats impossible for mere mortals. When he shouts, 'huge storms happen'." The life of North Korea's ailing leader, Kim Jong-il, has long been extravagantly window-dressed by the state's diligent chroniclers, but now it is about to get the full regal treatment with a new movie chronicling his exploits from childhood to living legend. North Korea's state media said this week that the first part of a multi-series documentary about Mr Kim's birth, childhood and early achievements, when he developed 'military ideas and theories and tactics of [his father] President Kim Il-sung', has already been produced. Although other propaganda movies extol Mr Kim's boundless virtues – one records that he came down from the heavens accompanied by a huge snowstorm – this will be the first to "comprehensively deal ... with his revolutionary exploits", said the Korean Central News Agency." (*Independent*, 17 July)

GOD AS A HISTORY MAKER

"The Christian right is making a fresh push to force religion onto the school curriculum in Texas with the state's education board about to consider recommendations that children be taught that there would be no United States if it had not been for God. Members of a panel of experts appointed by the board to revise the state's history curriculum, who include a Christian fundamentalist preacher who says he is fighting a war for America's moral soul, want lessons to emphasise the part played by Christianity in the founding of the US and that religion is a civic virtue. ... One of the panel, David Barton, founder of a Christian heritage group called WallBuilders, argues that the curriculum should reflect the fact that the US Constitution was written with God in mind including that 'there is a fixed moral law derived from God and nature', that 'there is a creator' and 'government exists primarily to protect God-given rights to every individual'....Another of the experts is Reverend Peter Marshall, who heads his own Christian ministry and preaches that Hurricane Katrina and defeat in the Vietnam war were God's punishment for sexual promiscuity and tolerance of homosexuals." (*Guardian*, 22 July)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 10th and 24th Sept. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail: 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

NORTHWEST

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Manchester branch. Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. Tel: 0161 860 7189

Bolton. Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589

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Carlisle. Robert Whitfield. E-mail: rewecr13@yahoo.co.uk tel: 07906 373975

Rochdale. Tel: R. Chadwick. 01706 522365

Southeast Manchester. Enquiries: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH

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Todmorden. Keith Scholey, 1 Leevue Ct, Windsor Rd, OL14 5LJ. Tel: 01706 814 149

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

South West branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

EAST ANGLIA

East Anglia branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

Cambridge. Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

NORTHERN IRELAND

Newtownabbey. Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freeserve.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

Ayrshire: D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freeuk.com

Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

MORE RELIGIOUS NONSENSE

"The Dalai Lama may not be the first person who comes to mind for business advice but, as the Buddhist monk wrote in his new book, capitalism can profit from Buddhism's principles and values. In *The Leader's Way*, published this month by Broadway Books, the spiritual leader of Tibet wrote that both business and Buddhism attach importance to happiness and making the right decisions, and a company without 'happy employees, customers and shareholders will ultimately fail.' Citing Buddhist basics such as good intentions, a calm mind free of negative thoughts and a realization that nothing is permanent, the Dalai Lama and co-author Laurens van den Muyzenberg tackle timely issues such as corporate compensation, malfeasance and the collapse of the subprime mortgage market. 'When I started this project, I was not sure that companies could act in such a way that they could deserve a thoroughly good reputation. Now I am convinced that they can,' the Dalai Lama wrote. Profit, for example, is 'a fine aim,' but not the main role of business, which is 'to make a contribution to the well-being of society at large,' he wrote." (*Yahoo News*, 28 July)

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P. O. Box 1266 North Richmond 3121, Victoria, Australia. Email: commonownership@yahoo.com.au

Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada. Box 4280, Victoria B.C. V8X 3X8 Canada. E-mail: SPC@iname.com

World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

World Socialist Party of the United States P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. E-mail: wspboston@cavad.net

The crisis: an open letter to trade unionists

Fellow Workers

Capitalism is once again in the middle of one of its periodic economic crises, this time a bigger one than in the recent past. And, as usual, we are the victims. This crisis has been caused, as all capitalist crises are, by the uncontrollable pursuit of profits that drives the capitalist economy.

With all capitalist businesses chasing profits, one sector of the economy inevitably overexpands in relation to what it can sell. This time it was the US house-building sector. Its overexpansion had an immediate effect on the banking sector which, in its chase after profits, had been engaging in dubious practices. This in turn had a knock-on effect on other sectors and is still working its way through the economy. Which is where we are today, with closed factories and rising unemployment alongside unmet needs.

Unemployment in Britain is expected to reach 3 million, maybe even before the end of the year. Faced with this economic tsunami, the government has been helpless. They have bailed-out the banks but, apart from that, all they have done is to print more money, but this won't get production going again. It will just stoke up inflation for later. It looks as if this Labour government will end like all previous Labour governments – leaving office with more unemployed than when they took over. So showing once again that governments can't control the way capitalism works.

The capitalist economy will eventually recover but of its own accord, not because of anything the government might do. And not without first putting the working class through many more months of additional misery.

Recovery will only come when the rate of profit is restored. Which employers are actively seeking to bring about by imposing wage freezes, even wage cuts, watering down pension schemes, and anything else they can think of to reduce their labour costs. Some have even had the cheek to ask their employees to work for nothing. Meanwhile both the Labour government and the Tory opposition are insisting that public sector workers will have to suffer too.

Workers should fight back. But the crisis has shifted the balance of forces even more in favour of employers. In the best of circumstances, when production is expanding and there is a labour shortage, unions have to work hard to get wages to go up a bit more than inflation. Now, with falling production and rising unemployment, unions can only try to put a brake on the downward slide, only try to stop things getting worse, .

Ask yourself this: Why should we have to fight the

same battles over and over again? Is this the only future? Yes, within the context of the capitalist system of production for profit, it is. But capitalism is not the only possible way of organising the production and distribution of the things we need. There is an alternative.

Workers can and should organise to end capitalism which forces them to work for wages to live. We should organise to replace it with a system based on producing the things we need simply because we need them and not to make a profit. Production for use, not production for profit. But we can't control what is produced unless we also own and control the means of production. In short, we need socialism, the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production.

To achieve this, workers need to take political action. We need to organise not just in trade unions but also as a political party with socialism as its aim and policy. This the Labour Party never was, even though it was originally set up and financed by the trade unions. Its policy was to work for reforms within capitalism. Labour governments did bring in some reforms, but they were never able to make capitalism work in the interests of workers. That's just not possible. All of them ended up merely managing capitalism and in the only way it can ever be – as a profit-making system in the interests of those who live off profits extracted from the unpaid labour of wage and salary workers. Instead of Labour changing capitalism, capitalism has changed Labour into the miserable band of self-seeking apologists for capitalism that everybody today can see they are. It's high time the unions stop financing this capitalist party, as some have already done.

Some are suggesting that, now that existing Labour Party has failed, the unions should set up a new Labour party. That would be a mistake. Labour reformism has failed once and it would fail again. So, let's not go down that road a second time. Let's learn the lesson of history that no government can manipulate capitalism to ensure permanent full employment and steadily rising wages, the TUC's illusion (and not only theirs) of a radiant future. Which, even if possible, would still leave the exploitation of wage-labour for profit on which capitalism is based.

No, what is needed is, as we said, a party with socialism as its aim and policy, an instrument workers can use to win control of political power with a view to ending capitalist ownership and the wages system and to bring in the common ownership of the means of production so that these can be used to meet people's needs in accordance with the principle "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs".

Socialism is still the hope of humanity. Let's work for it.

**The Executive Committee,
The Socialist Party of Great
Britain. August 2009**

Oil or democracy, what do you think?

Our rulers tell us they are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan for democracy. Not true.

In June 2009 in Afghanistan a group of heavily armed (with US weaponry) and masked Afghan thugs forced their way into the office of a Provincial Prosecutor and demanded that a detained prisoner be handed over to them. The Prosecutor refused and as the thugs became more threatening he called for the police. When the Provincial Police Chief along with the head of CID and other police arrived there was an escalation in the confrontation that culminated in the deaths of the chief of police, the head of CID and a number of others. The assailants fled the building and “vanished”.

Investigations led the police to a US Special Forces camp outside the town where US officers initially denied any knowledge of the incident or the perpetrators. Following several days of intense and very public pressure from the US installed puppet president, and former vice-president of Unocal (Union Oil Company), Hamid Kharzai, some 40 so-called “contractors” were eventually handed over to Afghani custody. (Kharzai, accused by the US of failing to run a tight enough ship, is not currently “flavour of the month”). The US Army and Special Forces washed their hands and denied any responsibility for these “civilians”.

Were these rogue elements outside of US control? History as well as current practice in Iraq make this unlikely. The US (and UK to a lesser extent) has a real penchant for creating, training and fully equipping foreign “special units”. From Nicaragua, where they called them “Contras”, to Colombia and most other Central and South American countries whose military officers were trained at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia and who then went on to direct regular or irregular units that waged war against the supposed enemies of freedom and democracy; in Iraq they are called the Iraqi Special Operations Forces. In every case local people call them Death Squads.

As the occupation of Afghanistan drags on and the body count climbs inexorably the pressure on President Obama to stick with his oft-stated plans of increased reliance on Special Forces, and to get results, will mount; the recent appointment of General Stanley McChrystal as commander in Afghanistan is a clear signpost in this

direction. McChrystal was head of Joint Special Operations Command 2003-2008, he was also commander of US Special Operations Forces in Iraq for 5 years.

So, with Obama offering “Change we can believe in”, how does the future bode for Afghans as the US and NATO bring peace, stability and good governance to their poor, benighted country? The occupation of Iraq offers a likely blueprint:

As Baghdad fell in early 2003 US Green Berets began a project at a facility in Jordan. There they trained young Iraqis with no prior military experience and moulded them into a Special Forces soldier’s wet dream; a covert, deadly, elite brigade, fully kitted out with state of the art equipment, a brigade that could operate indefinitely under US command and unaccountable to any Iraqi ministry.

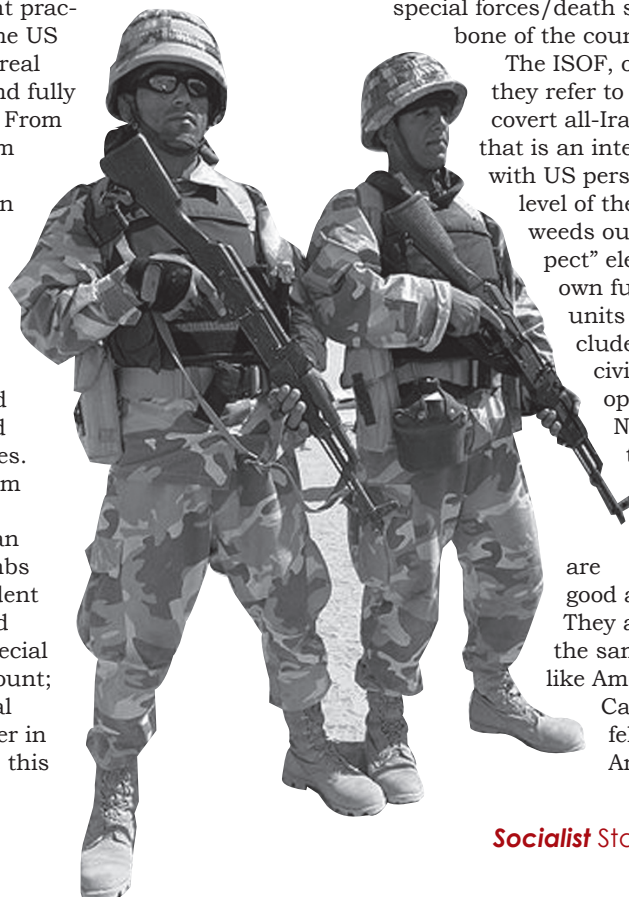
The head of the ISOF project is US General Trombitas, a 30-year veteran of Special Forces training teams in Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala. Trombitas claims to be “very proud of what was done in El Salvador” where special forces/death squads trained by him and others killed more than 50,000 civilians. In Guatemala some US trained special forces took part in the killing of around 140,000 people. In Colombia special forces/death squads now form the backbone of the country’s para-military police.

The ISOF, or the “Dirty Brigade” as they refer to themselves is, in reality, a covert all-Iraqi brigade of 9 battalions that is an integral part of the US military with US personnel embedded at every level of the command structure. It weeds out “unsympathetic” or “suspect” elements from wherever its own fully integrated intelligence units fingers them and that includes the Iraqi military, police, civil service and governing and opposition political parties.

No one in Iraq is off-limits to them:

“All these guys want to do is go out and kill bad guys all day. These guys are shit-hot. They are just as good as we are. We trained ‘em. They are just like us. They use the same weapons. They walk like Americans.” - Lt. Col. Roger Carstens, at the time a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, quoted by

Below: Death Squad? Members of the Iraqi Special Operations Forces



Shane Bauer, "Iraq's New Death Squad", *The Nation*, 3 June).

ISOF operations usually take place without *any* coordination with local security forces whose members are considered suspect. When police or army units show up in response to gunfire they are often targeted. Local commanders admit to turning away because if they intervene, report abuses or serious crimes by ISOF personnel they and their families are targeted. This US-created monster operates above and beyond any law. At present it answers to its master in the same way that the Taliban once answered to the ISS in Pakistan, Hamas was once supported by Israel and the Afghan war-lords once danced to the tune of the US dollar. How long beyond the supposed draw down of US forces will it be before the Iraqis at the head of this modern day SS assert their ruthless power and assassinate all in

their path to seizing total control?

Iraq has something the US wants – oil and long-term strategic bases; what about Afghanistan? A suppressed and cooperative Afghanistan is strategically vital to the US goal of bypassing Russia by piping gas and oil from the Caspian region through Pakistan to the sea. Originally they were very happy to do business with the Taliban government, it was

considered stable and pragmatic; then came 9-11 and even the grasping, venal oil barons balked at the probable public back-lash from doing business with those who were "with the terrorists".

So, today – Iraq; tomorrow – Afghanistan; and the day after tomorrow? If I were a Pakistani I'd be afraid, I'd be *very* afraid.

Policy has changed little, the means of achieving policy goals has changed little but it has become much more sophisticated.

Corporate state politician

Obama has delivered speeches around the world extolling the virtues of his new US policy of respect and tolerance for others – former enemies stand and cheer his every word. The contrast between words and deeds is plain to see for those who will take the trouble to look beyond the rhetoric. "Fine words butter no parsnips!" As the front-man of Corporate America, and in recognition of how thinly stretched its forces are, Obama is presently speaking of friendship, trust, respect, tolerance and cooperation whilst at the same time clearly wielding the big stick of consequences should *anyone* fail to recognise or respect the US's manifest Divine

Destiny. US foreign policy is not about furthering US interests to benefit its citizens it is about furthering US corporate interests to benefit its elite – very different from its publicly stated objective. To say that Obama came to "power" in the US is a misnomer, power is bedded within the "Corporate State" yet his electoral propaganda of "Change we can believe in", his apparent charm and chalk and cheese difference from Bush has millions around the world believing that the universe is a better place for his being elected – it is no different.

Despite the world economic crisis capitalism is not weakened, it can still fund its institutions and fulfil the fantasies of the elite, it can still fund its imperialist wars and it can still fund its formidable forces. We moan that we are not being paid enough to forge the chains and then cooperate in putting the shackles on our own ankles by voting for the myth that is the latest slick marketing ploy coming from the mouth of the newest political product of Corporate State Inc (or Plc). There has been no change!

Obama wrote a best-selling book called *Audacity of Hope*. I, for one, dare to hope but my hope lies not in some charismatic, middle-of-the-road corporate state politician. My hope lies in the set of principles that defines socialism and guides my vision of a future world. My hope lies in my belief in basic human decency and our shared humanity. We are the ancestors of those unborn – believing in false dreams will not bring about change for them. Shuffling paper or our feet will not further our objectives. Doing nothing or having a "they got us into this mess, they can get us out" attitude is, quite simply, not an option. Change will come when enough people decide that enough is enough. When enough people have done enough of the right things.

We need the world to be free of hunger, discrimination and fear. We need it to be free of thugs and mercenaries acting in the name of unrepresentative regimes. Should we wait for socialism or should we each do what we can as individuals? I know what my gut tells me. But until enough of "us" do enough of the one thing of which each of us is capable – sharing our vision and what we believe in; until we make a lot more socialists - *any difference will be transitory*. To bring real and lasting change for the benefit of all, the world needs socialism. Is that too audacious to hope for?

ALAN FENN

Sources: Shane Bauer "Iraq's New Death Squad", *The Nation*, 3 June (<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090622/bauer>). Dahr Jamail, "The Dirty War", *Mideast Dispatches*, 9 July (<http://dahrrjamailiraq.com/the-dirty-war>).



Above: General Stanley McChrystal, commander in Afghanistan and commander of US Special Operations Forces in Iraq for 5 years.

Japan : the road to Pearl Harbor

No-one can even pretend that the second world war in the East was other than a naked clash between imperialist powers over markets and raw materials.

The Second World War started for Japan in 1937, with its attack on China, four years before the attack on Pearl Harbor. The roots of the Pacific side of the conflict, however, went back a century. The seeds of conflict were sown in the unfair treaties enforced by Western powers in the Pacific, nurtured in their maintenance, and the racist exclusion of Eastern nations from equal recognition; and brought to fruit with trade restrictions and the struggle for US-UK naval supremacy.

While Japan had reformed economically under the Tokugawa Shogunate, in the 16th century, its closure to the outside world meant an almost complete lack of an accompanying industrial revolution. This ended in principle with the arrival of Perry in 1853 and his warships, returning a year later to sign an unequal trade agreement at cannon-point. Further unequal agreements with European powers followed. Japan was not the only victim. The pattern began with the British triumph in the First Opium War, leading to the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 (also signed under the threat of British naval bombardment of the city). This was probably what Marx was thinking about when he referred to capitalist trade being the cannons that knocked down Chinese walls. The Chinese were forced to drop tariffs and open ports to trade, without any reciprocation by Britain. The Japanese experience was similar (incidentally, the Japanese learned quickly; they imposed similar unfair agreements on Korea even before Western powers got round to it, in 1876).

Strong Army

This last, Korean example, is probably the key to later developments. The Japanese rulers, or at least the modernising, trade faction, realised that in a world of naked aggression enforcing unequal trade agreements, on a model well-rehearsed by Western powers, they needed to copy the West, build up a strong economy and a strong military, and muscle in on the racket. All of the unequal agreements had been based on humiliating military defeats or demonstrations of raw military technological power. The expression of this was the Meiji Resto-

ration of 1868 : the modernisers promoted their own emperor candidate, and under the slogan "Rich Country, Strong Army" set out to construct a modern Japanese state. The extent of the new, post-treaty Japan was established in 1876 when Japan conceded Sakhalin to Russia, retaining the Kurile Islands. Japan's imperative now was simple: in a country with no mineral resources of note, to build a state of sufficient economic strength and military power to become the ruler of the Western Pacific, cast off the treaties of the West, and impose its own.

The politics of the Meiji Restoration reflected this integral militarism.



The romanticism of Samurai history helped cement a firm base for nationalism and militarism in Japan

The Constitution promulgated in 1890 created an extremely strong executive, following the Prussian model, and allowed only an extremely limited franchise (about 5 percent of males, no females) based on a property qualification. In principle, the emperor had unlimited power; this was qualified by the tradition that, in practice, the emperor would not act so imperially. The military answered to the Emperor alone, not to the Cabinet. This meant that the military held a constant veto over the cabinet: since only a full cabinet could rule, and the Navy or Army minister had to be from them, either

the Navy or the Army could withdraw their minister and bring down the government. This was not a problem at first, but helps explain the later military dominance of the government.

The first objective was control of Korea, in a conflict referred to as the first Sino-Soviet war of 1894-5 : Korea, described as a 'dagger pointing at the heart of Japan', was the subject of pressure from China, but Japan struck first. A quick victory ensued, further weakening the Chinese Qing dynasty: Japan gained Taiwan, other territory, and a large indemnity that was ploughed straight back into industrial development. This was followed by assisting Western powers in the suppression of the Boxer uprising (probably the last straw that led to the fall of the Qing in 1911 and to the new Chinese government of Sun Yatsen). There followed the first match against a Western power, the Russians, in 1904-5: seizure of Port Arthur, the humiliation of the Russian fleet in the straits of Tsushima, and control (later annexation) of Korea and part of Manchuria, saw Japan's re-evaluation by Western powers. By taking back half of Sakhalin, in the Treaty of Portsmouth, Japan also tore up one more of the 'unequal agreements', and established de facto dominance in the area, frustrating Russian ambitions and limiting them to Vladivostok, a port which froze in winter and thus insufficient for their Pacific needs. This was also a show of strength against the Western powers who had overruled Japan at the end of the Sino-Japanese war just a decade previously, forcing them to hand Port Arthur to Russia which Japan had originally wanted for herself.

Post-war carve-up

Anglo-Japanese alliance, signed in 1902, led to Japan's entry on the 'Allied' side in WW1, gaining easy pickings from indefensible German territories both in China and island chains across the Pacific. At Australian and New Zealander insistence, even this early, Japan was limited in acquisitions by latitude and territories in reach of these Australasians which went to the US (which of course had not been idle in the Pacific: having annexed Hawaii in 1898, its war against Spain in 1898-99 yielded almost all

of Spain's possessions including the Philippines and Guam). German New Guinea (itself gained out of the disintegration of the Spanish empire in 1899) thus was split into the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas for Japan, Samoa for the US, and the Territory of New Guinea formed after WW1 to encompass all the territory that the Australians wanted to control. (The usual 'mandate' agreement).

Thus the battle lines were drawn for World War 2.

The problem was Japan had largely acquired barren lumps of rock. The rich territories of New Guinea were denied them. While some of these lumps of rock were useful (Iwo Jima, for example, does mean 'Sulphur island') and the island chains were rich in fish, by and large Japan had acquired an expensive police operation, while being short of the new naval fuel, oil, required to patrol them and trade between them.

While the US occupied Vladivostok in their attack against the Bolsheviks, the Japanese took the opportunity to occupy every city in the Russian maritime region (the US had asked them to send 7000 troops : the Japanese obligingly sent 70,000). Following the execution of Kolchak and thus the stabilisation of the Bolshevik regime, the US pulled out in 1920, but the Japanese continued their occupation until – note this – being forced to leave in 1922 due to pressure from the US and the British. Anti-Bolshevik policies count for nothing when Realpolitik demands the curbing of an erstwhile ally's power.

Excluded

The early interwar years were characterised by the disastrous Kanto earthquake (Kanto being the area around Tokyo), which killed 100,000, injured half a million and led to widespread rioting. Much of the damage was due to fires following the quake: the Japanese secret police helped fuel rumours of foreign agents and communist malcontents setting fires, resulting in a double win: the deflection of rioting from the government, and the opportunity to round up political opponents, especially anarchists and Bolsheviks. The cost of rebuilding was only the first economic insult. The Japanese suffered from several economic shocks even before the Great Depression, and their progressive exclusion from the world economy. The vast migration of poor peasant workers to the city, first generation proletarians, caused labour unrest and discontent amongst those who remained on the fields. This rural backlash against the cities, combined with a romanticism of past Samurai

history, cemented a firm base for nationalism and militarism outside of the cities – a similar pattern of rural support for nationalism/militarism also pertained in German support for Nazism. Politically, crises consistently led to increasing military control over the government.

Japanese trade was based on the import of raw materials, plus an agricultural sector devoted to silk production, and their working up to produce cheap textiles for the international market. These funds were used to buy what Japan lacked for her heavy industry and military production : coal, oil, scrap steel, and chemicals for munitions and plastics. In short, Japanese expansion was based on women's underwear. The silk trade was devastated by the development of rayon and nylon for stockings; attempts to diversify were more or less unsuccessful. During the Depression, also, the world divided firmly into trade blocs: the Sterling area, the Gold



An infant survivor of Japanese bombing, Shanghai

Standard, the Yen Bloc, the Soviets, and the direct transfers that characterised gold-poor Germany. All of these erected strong tariff barriers and strict quotas on goods that they sold themselves: for example, the Sterling Bloc (Imperial Preference) allowed only trivial sales of Japanese textiles due to their own excess production that they expected their colonies to absorb. One of the main reasons for Japanese attacks on China, culminating in the second Sino-Japanese war of 1937, was expanding the Yen bloc and finding markets for their products. The US, insisting on their 'Open Door' policy (basically the legacy of the 'unequal agreements' of the 19th century, imposed progressive sanctions against Japan, culminating in the freezing of Japan's dollar accounts (the most important factor) and the oil embargo. Britain, on the other hand, recognising its weak position vis-à-vis

the Japanese, and unable to maintain sufficient fleet assets in the North Sea, Mediterranean, and Singapore simultaneously, was extremely reluctant to antagonise the Japanese, yet forced to stay in step with the US for fear of alienating them in the European struggle. The Dutch were also bullied into trade, but in dollars, and with strict quotas imposed by the US and UK (the UK needed these resources for war; the US wanted to apply pressure).

Military adventures

Japanese military adventure overseas was driven by the army, not the cabinet. The method was the long-held Japanese tradition of 'Gekokujo' or principled insubordination by junior officers, Civil government was thrown into chaos as the army invaded Manchuria in 1931 (an easy victory, followed by problematic pacification campaigns; the Korean resistance movement included Kim Jong-Il as early as 1935, when these forces were absorbed into the Communist forces). In 1937 Japan attacked China, forcing the Nationalists and Communists into an uneasy alliance: and in 1939 the Japanese lost a test of strength against the Russians at Khalkin Gol (though the armistice, on essentially the same border, lasted till 1945). In 1940-41 Japan moved to occupy first part, then all of French IndoChina, following the fall of France. This gave them bases in range of Malaya and the Dutch East Indies.

And so we have the recipe for Pacific war. A country with a strong military, an extremely militaristic government and regimented society, and no resources to speak of, bankrupted both by the slings and arrows of outrageous depression economics and the deliberate screw of US policy in China, bogged down in a China whose defence was being funded and stiffened by US funded war materiel passing through UK and French territory, set out to gain by force what was denied them by the rules of peace. Oil in Borneo and Brunei, rubber and tin in Malaya, and above all the ability to pay for what was conquered with yen rather than now non-existent dollars. All this was well known to the allies. The UK in particular had made its plans to defend against the predicted assault, while desperately trying to forestall it. In short, the Japanese attack was one of the least surprising surprise attacks in history. The US simply underestimated their ability to strike at a distance.

The rest, as they say, is history.

BORIS BLACK



– the *ultimate* evil?

Capitalism stinks. It stinks of corpses. The millions starved to death, dead of preventable diseases, killed in war, worked to death: and the myriad mundane vicissitudes of class life, beaten to death in the petty squabbles of humans thrown together against their will, coughing out their final days with coaldust on their lungs or dying of lung cancer from tobacco, promoted to children, killing them in old age, ending with the suicide of those who can no longer stand the ruin that capitalism makes of a modern life.

For those of us who remain amongst the living, capitalism is a constant trial, mocked gleefully in the soap operas that, like fairground mirrors, reflect the ugly truth of our existence, misshapen and distorted. Rather than simple poverty, capitalism runs the full gamut of a life with a void at its centre: poverty of the underweight, poverty of the overweight, poverty of the deluded in their temples, poverty of the disillusioned who bear the absurdity of life lived not even for another, but for a number, a bank account, in more or less terror for their sanity.

I say all this to put my next statement into context. Nazism is not a special, nasty kind of capitalism. Everything undertaken in the regimes called Nazi, or fascist, finds its parallel in the capitalism of other areas, whether the 'free world' or the 'communist'. As captain Willard said in *Apocalypse Now*, of Vietnam, "charging a man with murder in this place was like handing out speeding tickets in the Indy 500". It's capitalism with a black shirt on.

In case there's still resistance to this notion, consider the rivers of blood that European powers – amongst which we should really number the United States – waded through in the Americas, treading a bloody trail from sea to shining sea, exploiting and murdering all those in their path. Or the British Empire, whether addicting millions to opium or starving them to death through either discipline or incompetence. The supposedly communist, in both

Russia and China, starving millions of their own people in famines both intentional and accidental. Millions have been worked to death in slave conditions within capitalism, from the plantations of the Americas, through the Gulags of Stalin, to the Nazi work camps. Today, of course, the whole world is a work camp, with the barbed wire replaced by immigration control and the richer parts of the West and other parts as gated communities.

So when I say that Nazism is no different to capitalism generally, I am not exonerating Nazism. I am damning capitalism. I am damning the Stalinists who still claim 'at least we defeated fascism' as their sole claim to fame – while Stalin killed more than Hitler ever did. The so-called liberal democracies claim that they could never go to war, and their forces are only for defence: yet they have slaughtered their way across the globe on the flimsiest of pretexts, such as the sinking of the USS Maine leading to the Spanish-American War in the late 19th century – a purely imperialist grab against a weakened Spain, fulfilling the Monroe Doctrine just as closely as the Nazis with their Lebensraum. Other incidents, such as the Gulf of Tonkin, are now known to have been ruses; there is no need to enter into vast conspiracy theories to say that a disproportional response is no different to a war of aggression. At least ironically, one could credit mad dictators with honesty; the drive to profit inherent in all capitalist regimes, in them is closer to the surface and less buried in doubletalk.

In fact, one can measure the bankruptcy of a political position fairly accurately by the need to resort to 'we're better than the Nazis' as an excuse. It means that their wages are 5 percent better, they kill 7 percent less civilians, their press is 13 percent less prone to lies and censorship; but they still force their citizens to work, they still murder for profit, they still lie to keep 'their' workers in line.

Racism, for example, is not some special product of a diseased

ideology. It is a basic part of state building in the early stages, reused at those times when international trade is low and protectionism, coupled with aggressive or military action, becomes a state priority. There is not a magic race ogre that leads people, Pied Piper fashion, down the road to bigotry: in class society it is a well-travelled highway.

In short, capitalism is a thing that should fill us with disgust and revulsion. To pick and choose isolated moments of its history and claim that they are the true evil is to attempt to rescue the whole, like Bolsheviks bickering over whether the charnel house that was Russia in the 1930s would have been better or worse with Trotsky or Stalin at the helm: or, really, like any US presidential election, for the rest of the world. Kennedy or Nixon? Carter or Reagan? Every one of these men has been prepared to turn the world into a radioactive cinder, yet people still debate their relative merits.

We have had a century and more of capitalists trying to bolster their pathetic reputations by showing how much better their labour camp is than that run by those next door. Whether it's Nazis, Bolsheviks, Maoists, or Prussians, Russians and the Inscrutable East, every single one of these societies has been built on the energies, the lost hopes, and the bones of workers, both at home and abroad. To single out any one of these as the one root of evil is to try to whitewash capitalism itself, to deny that there is evil at the very root of our whole world.

This is why socialists oppose all capitalism, and refuse to take sides. We recognise that some circumstances are better than others, but none are worth a drop of workers' blood, especially not when all of our energies should be turned towards rooting out capitalism as a system. We do not set up fascism against capitalism – we set up capitalism against socialism. Join us in the real human crusade.

SJW

“War is organised murder and nothing else”. “It was not worth it, it was not worth one let alone all the millions” (Harry Patch)



Two of the last known surviving combatants of the first World Slaughter died in July. Both were over a hundred-years old. The second of the two, Harry Patch, had some very enlightening views on the subject of the slaughter. Not surprisingly some sections of the media, not wanting to upset the military and other dealers in death, were not inclined to give some of his views the prominence which they deserved.

The “Great War” (great for whom? Undertakers? Arms salesmen?) was supposed to be the war to end all wars. Given that there has not been a single day since 11 November 1918 when there has not been some armed conflict going on, it can only be said to be a failure in this respect. This can hardly be a surprise to anyone with even the slightest grasp of socialist principles.

In 1914 many people were led by propaganda to think of themselves as belonging to the same “nation state” as their so-called “betters”. Kitchener’s famous poster of “Your Country Needs You!” is simply put down by the socialist maxim that the workers of the world have no country. Alas, countless thousands were intimidated, bullied, coerced or simply blindly led to the slaughter. Those who have chuckled at the antics of Rowan Atkinson as captain Blackadder might like to reflect that behind the humour there is more than a grain of truth in these episodes.

This article is not written to dwell on the horrors of trench warfare, the introduction of gas and tanks or the futility of the mass bloodshed to gain a few yards of Belgian mud. There are countless other articles doing this. Suffice it to say that even though the trenches were an insult to humanity most troops actually gained weight whilst in the army, not that army rations were so good, just food at home was so poor or non-existent. Others covered also the horrors of conscripts, many who had lied about their age to enlist and who should have been back at school, being shot at dawn for cowardice.

Harry Patch’s point was that the war was simply a family squabble which was not worth the shedding of one single drop of (working class) blood for. In that most of the (unelected) royal houses of Europe were related by marriage and blood, he was correct in this respect. Not without good reason were the Empress Maria Theresa and later Queen Victoria known as the Grandmothers of Europe, their children and

grandchildren having married into Europe royal houses.

It may or may not be true that Victoria thought submarines were unsporting and ungentlemanly and shouldn’t be used or that her grandson Kaiser Wilhelm was being a naughty boy. It may also be true that the monarchy and their hangers-on had more influence then but the war was simply a continuation of business by other means.

Wars would not be fought unless the profits of some important section of business was under severe threat. The capitalist (ruling) classes are not daft enough to allow their workers to be killed without good reason. And, taking a lesson from the slave owners, they did not expect soldiers to fight well if their stomachs are empty. No access for business to markets, resources or investment outlets = no profits = war. That is the simple logic which condemned so many men and women to death. A fight with other workers who in most cases did not even have a common language, let alone a quarrel with them. Workers who on both sides would rather have been with their families or going about their everyday (peacetime) tasks. Almost 100 years later nothing has changed.

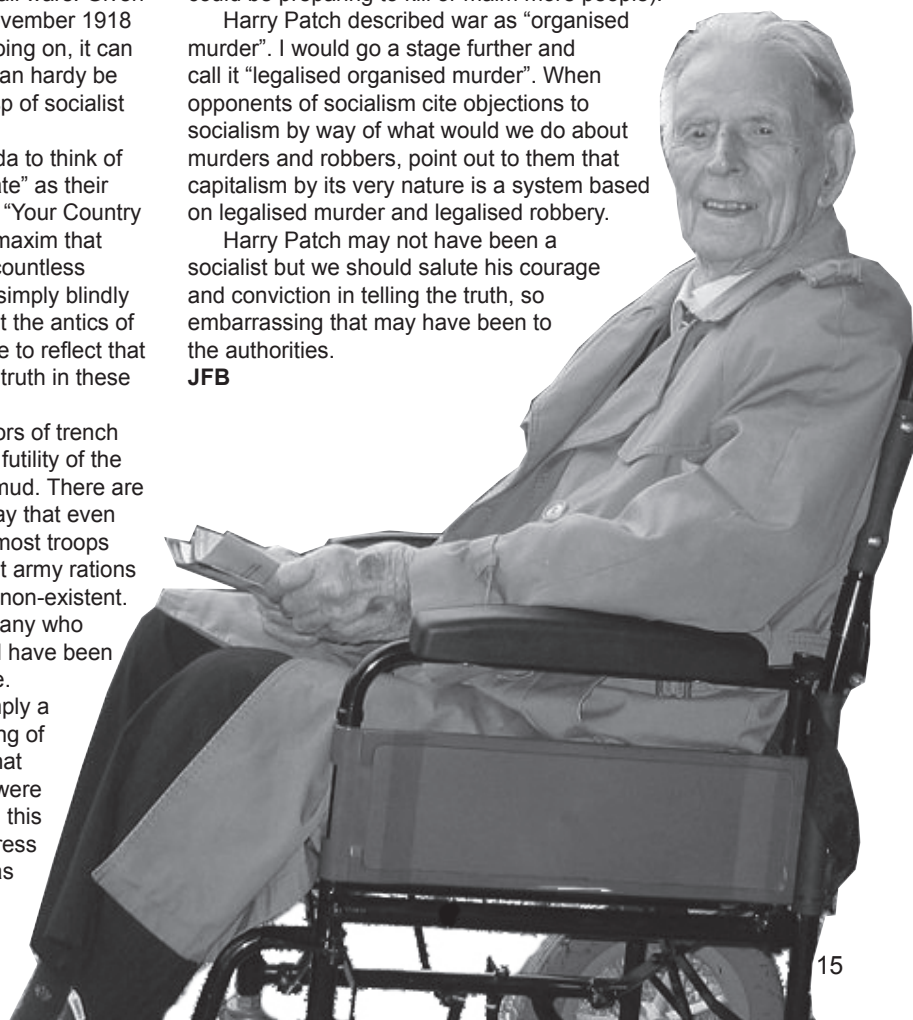
The profit motive shows its head even further. In the current events in Afghanistan troops have been killed because allegedly their equipment was not sturdy enough or up to scratch. Should we or they be surprised? Of course not. The ruling classes want to win their wars as quickly and cheaply as possible and if that means a few more casualties so be it. (Arms manufacturers of course want the war to be as long and expensive as possible).

Harry Patch’s bravery was a type that some might not recognise. His gunnery team made a pledge not to shoot at the “enemy” (with whom they had no personal quarrel or animosity) unless absolutely necessary and then only shoot at their legs to wound them and not kill them. (In subsequent wars weaponry has been designed not to kill but to cripple; wounded combatants coming home minus limbs is bad for moral – ask Thatcher why the wounded of the Falkland’s were not allowed to appear at the “victory” parade – and tending the wounded when they are back home “wastes” valuable resources which could be preparing to kill or maim more people).

Harry Patch described war as “organised murder”. I would go a stage further and call it “legalised organised murder”. When opponents of socialism cite objections to socialism by way of what would we do about murders and robbers, point out to them that capitalism by its very nature is a system based on legalised murder and legalised robbery.

Harry Patch may not have been a socialist but we should salute his courage and conviction in telling the truth, so embarrassing that may have been to the authorities.

JFB



A Post-Conflict World

Imagine a world without war

FOCUS ON conflict; spiralling to encompass more and more areas of the world; bringing “terror” into all cities east, west, north, south; wreaking chaos on whole countries; creating friction between different sections of the population – between people who previously had no reason to be suspicious or fearful of the other. This is what those in power around the world would subject us to and in this they are having no small success.

Now focus on how it *could be* if the majority of the world’s people were to have their say, and imagine a world without conflict following a transformation in thinking. A transformation in thinking that comes about through the realisation and understanding by individuals who alone or in small numbers have little influence over what they can achieve against the powers of a state but when working together for common aims can bring the power to the people where it belongs. Not military power. Not economic power. Decision-making power.

States, i.e. governments, (or even small sections of government) have the prerogative of violence. All means are in their control and they allow themselves the sole right to use violence, to use police and armed forces against whomever they label as enemies, as a threat to the state or as a threat to national security. The citizenry can’t be a party to the details. In fact even discussing making them a party to the details in itself will be heralded as risking national security further and giving them the excuse to restrict us even more. But, imagine gradually more and more people, seeking an egalitarian and peaceful society, protesting at their government’s armed interventions in other countries, as for example today in Afghanistan and Iraq.

And more and more daring to protest at the level of violence at home perpetrated by the authorities towards citizens on the streets. More letters written to more newspapers and to representatives of the people at all levels; more emails flashing around the globe to encourage others to get involved; more websites and blogs to which people can add their name to show dissidence; more meetings and demonstrations displaying withdrawal of support by the masses for their so-called leaders. Bertrand Russell told CND many years ago,

“If all those who disapprove of government policy were to join massive demonstrations of civil disobedience they could render government folly impossible.” It’s not impossible to believe that numbers could become such that members of the forces of repression and armed aggression decide that they will no longer act against fellow citizens or against citizens of another nation. Significant numbers have already spoken out against such aggression, more of them beginning to feel the pressure of society, a society of which they are a part, (not apart from!) a society made up of their friends, family members, school mates, neighbours, a society whose interests they are supposedly engaged in defending. In the case of civil disturbances, strikes and demonstrations they will now join ranks with their own masses preventing repression at home and opposing interference in the destinies of other societies which conversely have no argument with them.

Imagine the power falling away from those who have used it recklessly around the world and into the hands of this majority seeking an egalitarian and peaceful society. Imagine the armed forces, now under the democratic control of the people, committed to securing all weapons, armaments, vehicles, planes, helicopters, ships, submarines, war materiel of all kinds including factories and depots; securing them from any further use whilst and until they can be dismantled, recycled or made safe.

Are people to stand by passively observing societies descend into the dystopian dissolution that many see as inevitable or shall they stand up together against aggression in all its manifestations in a process of struggle and achievement? Imagine this amazing specimen of revolution, this fantastic human organism, coming together at last to realise its full potential – for what the preamble to the UN Declaration of Human Rights refers to as dignity and worth, freedom, justice and peace.

As Edward Said has written, “There is always the possibility of another social model.”

J.S.



Hunting in the morning

IT WAS a good idea. To take Marx’s passing comment in the *German Ideology* that in a communist society (socialism) he could “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” and put it to the test. The trouble was that this was done by a free newspaper, handed out at London tube stations, aimed at twentysomethings whose usual interest is the goings-on of celebrities.

According to Andy Jones who carried out the test:

“A mantra drawn from the teaching in Marx’s 1867 book *Das Kapital* (but sexed up for the modern reader) tells how he predicted the working classes would increasingly buy expensive goods and houses until their debt became unbearable. And when all this went belly-up, the State would have to turn to communism as a way out. In the ensuing communist Utopia, Marx reckoned the average working man should be able to go fishing in the morning, work in a factory in the afternoon and read Plato in the evening”. (*The London Paper*, 17 April)

Actually, this wasn’t Marx’s exact suggestion but it could have

been and Jones seems to have enjoyed himself engaging in his three activities in a single day.

But where on Earth did he get his version of what Marx is supposed to have taught? Certainly not from Marx himself as it bears no resemblance to anything he wrote. What Marx actually wrote in *Capital* about how he thought the end of capitalism would eventually come was:

“Along with the constantly diminishing number of the mag-nates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. Thus integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.” (Volume I, chapter 32).

Nothing here about workers getting more and more into debt by buying expensive goods and houses. Rather the opposite if anything.

We do in fact know the source of Jones’s nonsense. It was this

Why are we waiting?

Reflections of a man in a queue

What are you waiting for? For a certain little lady to come by? For world peace? For that moment when you can slap a parking ticket on that stationary vehicle whose owner has committed the heinous crime of being one minute longer than they should have been? For the chance to appear in 'Big Brother'? For the dentist to call you in and prove that you have nothing to fear but fear itself? For the weekend when your life feels like it belongs to you and no one else? For the arms of Morpheus to envelop you? For the price of petrol/train season ticket to become more affordable? For your team to win promotion this season? For someone to bid on that eBay item you're trying to sell? For the replacement of a social system predicated upon the pursuit of profit, profit and more profit?

The local newsagents/post office. Lunchtime. Three counter positions. Two of them closed. Surprise, surprise! Long queue building up behind me. Metaphorically, I pull out my flask, sandwiches and copy of the Beano and settle down for a long wait. I try uttering the mantra, "patience is a virtue," but this doesn't work as my concentration is disturbed by the mucky magazines in my eye line. Ian Drury's song, starts

running through my head, "In my yellow jersey, I went out on the nick. South Street Romford, shopping arcade, Got a Razzle magazine, I never paid, Inside my jacket and away double quick." (*Razzle in my pocket*)

Last time I was rooted to one spot for so long without moving was in a traffic jam just outside Worcester. On the satnav I watched an hour of my life go to waste as I fumed in the queue. I'm just on the point of turning to someone and saying, "When I was a lad we didn't have queues this long you know!" Fortunately, I manage to avoid turning into bore number 147.

I move through ninety degrees and peruse those behind me. I'm

"Are those queuing behind me aware of their role as wage slaves within a capitalist system?"

not that sensitive to other people's moods but even I could sense their resentment. Their blood pressure is rising exponentially with every minute of inactivity that passes. I gauge this by the angry flush which is appearing on their faces and the muttered imprecations which are beginning to sound more and more and like an audition for a collective of Wiccan worshippers in that Scottish play by Shakespeare.

I too join in the muttering. I am debating with myself whether I should give in to an overwhelming urge to fix them with a glittering eye and expound upon the benefits of a social system based upon production for use, not profit. After all, my fellow wage slaves are the ones who actually run the system on behalf of a minority.

Waiting for Godot is a play by Samuel Becket. There are two characters called Estragon and Vladimir who, in a two day time frame, engage in various activities whilst waiting for a character called Godot to arrive. In the first scene Estragon after trying hard to remove his shoe, and failing, says, "Nothing to be done."

"Nothing to be done!" has resonance amongst those who are constantly propounding empirical

reasons why this global social system, capitalism, has fulfilled its historical purpose and needs to be replaced. "Nothing to be done!" is an oft-repeated response from other members of the working class when real socialism is explained to them.

Go on the comments section of some internet blogs or media sites. Amongst the jeering, insults, and puerile name calling you will find countless posts complaining how tough times are and how they are going to get tougher. These tirades are often directed at individuals, e.g. politicians, organizations, e.g. political parties, or institutions, e.g., the European Union, who appear, in the eyes of those posting, to hold some malignant influence over their lives. For the sake of veracity, it has to be said, that 'socialism' is often cited in less than complimentary terms.

It doesn't take a genius to work out that the 'socialism' referred to as being more scary than the bogeyman is state capitalism as practised by the ex-Soviet Union and by regimes such as North Korea, Cuba and others today. Moaning and whinging seems to be becoming an art form. In the art of not doing anything. A pervasive fatalistic air is apparent. Amongst many who are who are posting on the internet anyway, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it," (Karl Marx). Well, here's the tough love; whining about it ain't gonna change anything!

The local branch of the bank that likes to be international and local at one and the same time. Mid-morning. Once upon a time there were five counter positions. Now there are only two. One of which is shut. Yet another queue. The frustrations emanating from the increasingly exasperated wage slaves wasting time trying to avail themselves of the banks 'services' are palpable. Are those queuing behind me aware of their role as wage slaves within a capitalist system that daily exploits them in its ever more desperate attempts to fulfil its *raison d'être*? The thing about capitalism is that it's fulfilled its historical function to lay down the necessary social conditions for a transition to a wageless, moneyless, leaderless, classless, stateless society. It's just that the vast majority of paid and unpaid members of the working class don't

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hoax email that did the rounds:

"Can you believe that this was said by Karl Marx 142 years ago (1867)! What do you think, doesn't it apply today???! PRONTO !!!!!!!!!!!!!!! 'Owners of capital will stimulate the working class to buy more and more of expensive goods, houses and technology, pushing them to take more and more expensive credits, until their debt becomes unbearable. The unpaid debt will lead to bankruptcy of banks, which will have to be nationalised, and the State will have to take the road which will eventually lead to communism.' Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, 1867" (see <http://www.hoax-slayer.com/karl-marx-quote.shtml>)

The suggestion is that this false quote was made up either as a joke or by someone opposed to the Bush/Obama policy of the state acquiring a majority stake in banks. Which of course was state capitalism and had nothing to do with communism (or socialism, the same thing)..

As things are now

The third part of “Then and Now – how we live and how we used to live”. What life might be like after socialism has been established.

The world has certainly changed a lot in these last few decades, to an extent that I wouldn't have thought possible had I not lived through it all. During the final stages of capitalist society, the past was often spoken of as a golden age which people looked back to with nostalgia. Well, not any more. I speak for the vast majority in heartily wishing the past good riddance.

Take houses. In comparison with the old wreck of a building my family and I choose to live in, with its leaky drains and crumbling brickwork, the homes that have been built or modified recently are marvels of comfort, efficiency and safety. They are earthquake-proof and built well away from flood-prone areas. The sanitary blocks and most of the kitchen appliances in the new communal living centres are virtually maintenance-free. Even so, once in a while any dwelling place needs sprucing up. Of course they are all common property, like every other major resource; so whoever is there at the time just gets out the cleaning equipment and gets on with it. Fifteen minutes and the job's done.

We could move into one of these new places if we wanted but actually, the house we live in is just a base. Quite a lot of the time I am elsewhere, helping on forest renewal or food growing projects in different parts of the world. My partner usually comes with me and joins in with the child mentoring activities of whatever locality we are in.

Many different social patterns are emerging and the dwellings being built reflect them. There are still many conventional houses and flats for people who prefer the old family-style arrangement, but there has been a huge growth in communal hotel-like accommodation, some catered, some self-catering, in campsite and kibbutz-style arrangements and in staffed care homes for the infirm and disabled.

There's nothing to stop you from trying out any type of accommodation, subject to availability of course, but that is rarely a problem. Some people are constantly on the move and never stay in the same place for very long. Being frequent travellers, we experience all types of living styles ourselves and I must say that in the larger communities sometimes it's very hard, if not impossible, to know whose children are whose or where one family begins and another ends. But the children all appear well-fed and well looked after.

The more primitive tribal communities are flourishing again, now there is no threat of their lives being swamped by the economic monster – they may choose to carry on living in their traditional ways, but of course they too have access to all the food and medical care they need.

Local infrastructure is more or less self-administering; every community has its own food stores and growing areas, transport pools, maintenance depots and medical centres, with experts always on hand to sort out emergencies or the more tricky jobs. If you want food you just take what you need and record what you've taken so it can be re-stocked. While they are at it, most people have a general look at what else may be running short and make sure that's recorded too. And these places are kept tidy – nobody would dream of walking out and leaving them in a mess. They belong to us, after all.

Today we take for granted that we use our energies for contributing to and improving the common lot and hence our own lives in the process. The very idea of being paid sums of

money for what we do is absurd. We do what is necessary to keep society working as we want it to work, we do it voluntarily and mostly we enjoy it because those repetitive, unproductive tasks that have not been automated are shared amongst an abundant and self-defining group of volunteers. Indeed, the sharp distinction that existed in money-based society between work and leisure is now almost non-existent since the vast majority of tasks and projects that occupy us are intrinsically worthwhile and enjoyable. Of course, some aren't - but when did the prospect of an unpleasant job deter anyone from rolling their sleeves up and getting on with it if it was necessary? Compared with the mind-numbingly dull and dirty jobs people had to put up with in capitalist society, they are a drop in the ocean.

We are used to being able to enquire on a regular basis what work is needed, whether it be in our particular locality or hundreds of miles away, registering our availability and suitability in terms of experience and qualifications, then turning up if and when required and getting on with it. We can do several different jobs at once, some may be long-term, some may last only a few hours. We can register with a competence agency to train and qualify for a variety of specialised jobs and if our more expert peers deem us suitable, we can be drivers one day and teachers the next. In fact very few people choose to stick exclusively to the same type of work for any length of time. There again – I know a doctor who does a 60-hour week and loves every minute.

There is a worldwide resources database which records such things as global stocks of food and other essential goods. Areas of temporary shortage are quickly identified and production is then geared up to meet it. Where possible this is done locally, otherwise the food and goods are moved to the areas that need them as quickly and efficiently as possible: no import duties, no demands for payment, no unnecessary delays.

I hope it goes without saying that the potential impact on the environment of the goods and machines we produce is assessed very carefully such that pollution and wastage of energy and resources are kept to a minimum. Nothing is wrapped in redundant packaging; where possible everything is made from recyclable material, and all factories and modes of transport emit virtually no toxic exhaust fumes. The days of smelly, polluting mill chimneys and petrol and diesel engines are over. It's still a bit too early to say but the signs are that the damage done to the environment by advanced capitalist society will almost completely be reversed in time.

We do have “possessions”: our homes, though strictly speaking communal property, effectively belong to us as individuals or groups because there is no reason for anyone else to wish to eject us, and, of course, we have personal effects; but, unless they have personal significance for us, we see no need to take them with us when we move, since similar items for our use will be available wherever we decide to go. There is no trauma at the loss of such articles, no need to claim monetary compensation, and, since they are available to all, the notion of theft is simply absurd. Of course, if you are someone's guest, you don't just help yourself to their food or goods, you wait to be asked – but that's just common courtesy.

And because there is no pressure to change for the sake of change, or to buy to make someone else rich, things are built to last, at the highest quality, and nobody feels the need to constantly replace them for something better or different.

The first generation to be born into a world free of money, leaders and national divisions is now grown up. They have a totally different outlook on life and could no more think of reverting to a money-based existence than our early 21st century forebears could have gone back to that even more rigidly structured period known as the middle ages...but I must say I can't understand some of these young kids even when they talk slowly - and as for what passes for music these days, I really do give up. Some things never change.

Rod Shaw



A salaried economy, no thanks

"From the hawkers, rickshaw drivers and shoe shiners on the streets of downtown Jakarta to the cash-in-hand car mechanics, cleaners and nannies in the smart neighbourhoods of London, the underground economy is booming", said the *Times* (24 April) commenting on a report that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had just published. Entitled *Is Informal Normal?*, the report estimated, according to the *Times*, that in the world "a record 1.8 billion workers are employed in underground activities, compared with 1.2 billion in the formal sector".

Actually, "underground activities" is inaccurate. The term preferred by the OECD is "informal" by which they mean buying and selling activities that are not declared to the tax or social security authorities. In developed capitalists such undeclared economic activities are "underground" but are only marginal. In other parts of the world, however, – India, Indonesia, most of Latin America, Asia and Africa in fact – they amount to over 50 percent. This is mainly because they don't have to be declared. In a chapter on "Informal Employment and Promoting the Transition to a Salaried Economy" an earlier OECD report explained:

"In less-developed non-OECD countries, statistical estimates usually include purely informal work, which is unregistered but not hidden because there is no effective requirement for it to be declared. Formal employment with payment of tax and social security contributions becomes an 'island' in a large 'sea' of informal work. The formal sector may still account for over 50% of GDP – due to its higher relative productivity – suggesting that the benefits from a longer-term transition to a salaried economy through progressive

expansion of the sector can be large" (www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/25/34846912.pdf).

A "salaried economy"? As one where most paid work is done by people paid a wage by an employer to do it, it's another name for a capitalist economy since capitalism is based, precisely, on waged labour. The rickshaw drivers and shoe-shiners of Jakarta are not wage-workers. They are workers in that they work and provide a use-value, for which they are paid. But what they get from selling their service is only enough to allow them to cover the costs of being able to keep on working. They don't produce a surplus over and above this and so don't contribute anything towards economic development, i.e. capital accumulation.

What difference would it make if instead of selling their service directly to the customers, they were to become employees of a rickshaw or a shoe shining company? They would still be doing exactly the same work as before and getting more or less the same money. The difference is that employers are not philanthropists. They only employ someone if there's something in it for them – if they can end up with more money than they had invested in buying the materials and hiring workers. In other words, if they made a profit on their capital.

Marx explained that the source of this profit is the unpaid labour of the employees; they not only transfer the value of their own upkeep to the product but also a further amount for which they are not paid and which belongs to the employer. This extra value is new value, most of which is accumulated as new capital. The OECD wants to turn rickshaw drivers, shoe shiners and the like in countries where informal work is currently high into salaried wage-slaves because this is what the capitalist development they favour involves. As socialists, we stand for the "Abolition of the Salaried Economy".

from page 17

know that yet.

The couple at the counter finally sorts out their business. She apologies to us all for keeping us waiting. I say out loud, it's not your fault, it's the banks. In my mind I'm screaming, "We don't need banks! Abolition of the wages system! Free access of goods and services! From each according to his/her abilities, to each according to their needs! Had I said all this aloud in one of the temples of the moneychangers what response would I have got? Would I have been dragged kicking and screaming into a police van or into a conveyance to the local mental health hospital. Well! What a looney! (Political correctness in the use of language hasn't permeated to my part of the world). Elimination of money? Cor, we might be getting seriously peed off wasting our life in this queue but that suggestion is just ridiculous. Isn't it? Hell, I don't want to bring back more counter positions in banks and post offices. I want a social system where money and the need for financial transactions of any kind are no longer necessary.

"I'm so tired, Tired of waiting, Tired of waiting for you." (Ray Davies and The Kinks). I've reached an age where "Time's winged chariot hurrying near" resounds much more loudly nowadays. I think I can legitimately describe myself as a 'grumpy old man.' Thing is, I don't think that you have to be old to be grumpy and dissatisfied to know that there's something wrong with the way that we live. Like the Kinks I'm getting increasingly frustrated waiting for the transition to a better social system which will supersede the one we have now. Capitalism has outlived its usefulness and is inhibiting the personal, and collective, growth of everyone

on this planet. The problem is this better life isn't going to happen without us all putting in some serious effort to bring it about. "It's your life, And you can do what you want." So what do you want to do? Are you happy with your life? It's down to us all. What are we waiting for?

DAVE COGGAN



Harry Potter and the Unchanging Church

AMONGST THE crazier news items to captivate the hacks of what used to be Fleet Street surely the one about the Pope and Harry Potter must takes a bit of beating. In a world of widespread poverty and hunger, global pollution and the threat of a nuclear conflict, *The Times* saw the necessity of devoting a spread to this non-event.

"Once condemned by the Pope for undermining the soul of Christianity, Harry Potter has been forgiven. In 2003, two years before he was elected Pope Benedict XV1, Joseph Ratzinger, then a Cardinal and head of Vatican doctrine, said J.K. Rowling's stories of the boy wizard threatened to corrupt an understanding of Christian faith among the impressionable young. ... Now however the Pope seems to have fallen under the Potter spell. The latest in the film series, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, is on general release in Britain today, and has won surprising praise from the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*" (*Times*, 15 July).

The basis of the *Times's* surprise seems to be the changing of the unchanging church, but the history of the Roman Catholic religion is one of change to accord with the changes in the non-spiritual world. Indeed the church's backflips have been many and the *Times* article even listed a few of them.

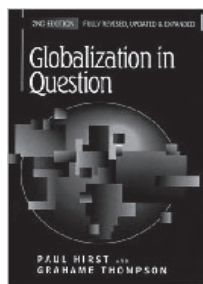
Until the Second Vatican Council, in 1962-65, Catholic Mass was celebrated only in Latin. In 2003 the Church withdrew a threat to excommunicate the parents of a Nicaraguan girl aged 9 who had an abortion after being raped. 26,000 signed a petition against the move. In 2007 they abolished Limbo, a sort of halfway point between Heaven and Hell. All these recent changes are in addition to Pope John Paul II in 1992 finally admitting that the Church was in error 359 years before when they condemned Galileo for claiming that the Earth revolved around the Sun.

In order to survive the Roman Catholic Church has had to change in line with how secular society changes. There are some unchanging tenets of their practice however - their unfaltering support of private property and their collecting dishes at church services. The Lord may provide for the gullible faithful but the clergy rely on something more tangible for their income.

R.D.

Book Reviews

Globalization in Question. By Paul Hirst, Grahame Thompson and Simon Bromley. Polity Press, 2009



Globalization is one of the key concepts of our time, accepted by both the right and left as the cornerstone of their analysis of the international economy. In both political and academic discussions, the assumption is often made that globalization of the past few decades is a qualitatively new stage in the development of international capitalism; that integration of national economies into the international economy is an inevitable process to which national governments are largely powerless. This book challenges these notions.

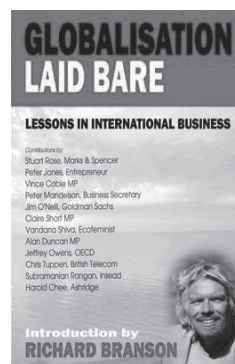
The authors, using detailed evidence, argue for the following conclusions. The present highly internationalised economy is not unprecedented. In some respects, the current globalized economy has only recently become as open and integrated as the regime that prevailed from 1870 to 1914. Genuinely transnational companies are relatively rare. Most companies are based nationally and trade regionally or multinationally on the strength of a major national location. There is no major trend towards the growth of truly global companies. Foreign direct investment is still highly concentrated among the advanced industrial economies, and the Third World remains marginal in both investment and trade. The emergence of India and particularly China has disrupted this picture, though it has not significantly shifted the centre of gravity from the already advanced countries. Investment, trade and financial flows are concentrated in the Triad of Europe, Japan/East Asia and North America, and this dominance seems set to continue. Supranational regionalization (e.g. European Union, North American Free Trade Agreement, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) is a trend that is possibly stronger than that of globalization. The major economic powers, centred on the G8 with China and India, have the capacity, especially if they coordinate policy, to exert powerful governance pressures over financial markets and other economic tendencies. Global markets

are therefore by no means beyond regulation and control, though this will be limited by the divergent interests of states and their ruling elites.

The authors show some awareness of the historical development of capitalism, though they view this largely as the history of technological innovation. As the above shows, the emphasis in this book is on the institutional arrangements (social, economic and political) and their interrelationships within capitalism, with no real comprehension of the underlying dynamic of capitalism. As a result they do not explain that it is the competitive accumulation of profits which is the driving force of capitalism's inherent tendency towards globalization.

LEW

Globalisation Laid Bare. Lessons in International Business. Industry and Parliament Trust. 2009. £11.99.



The Industry and Parliament Trust is a body set up to promote "mutual understanding between the UK Parliament and the worlds of business, industry and commerce" and this is their

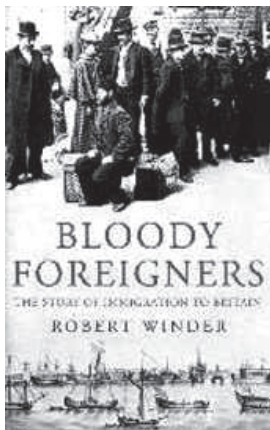
take on globalisation. Introduced by Sir Richard Branson, it is a collection of short articles by various other capitalists and their academic and political supporters.

The contributors main concerns seem to be how to avoid protectionism re-emerging in the current crisis and how to accommodate to China as an emerging industrial and commercial power. The contributors from the three main parties (Vince Cable, Alan Duncan and Baron Mandelson) all say the same thing - "down with protectionism" and "keep liberalising world trade" - reflecting their common perception of what is in the best interest of British capitalism.

The only dissenters are "Indian ecofeminist" Vandana Shiva and Clare Short.

ALB

Bloody Foreigners – The story of immigration to Britain. By Robert Winder. Abacus, 2004



"In 1859 Friedrich Engels poked a man in the eye with an umbrella and soon heard from the man's lawyers. 'Needless to say', he wrote, 'these blasted

English don't want to deprive themselves of the pleasure of getting their hands on a bloody foreigner.'"

This book is an account of the 'tangled roots' of history that make up the mongrel 'British nation', pointing out that from the amalgamation of Jutes, Saxons, Romans, Danes etc. up to the present time one would be hard-pressed to find a true (pure) Englishman. Immigration, and conversely emigration, has been an intricate part of its development. In the 12th century came French Jews to London, Lincoln, York and Norwich; in the Elizabethan age Italian musicians, German businessmen and the first African slaves; then Protestants from the Low Countries seeking religious tolerance; Huguenot refugees from France 'en masse' in the 17th century; likewise Greek Christians fleeing from the Turks. In 1768, courtesy of the slave trade, there were 20,000 black Londoners out of a total population of 600,000 and in 1840 400,000 Irish escaping the potato famine came to Manchester, London, Liverpool and Glasgow. By the end of the 19th century 40,000 Italians and 50,000 Germans had settled here plus 150,000 Jewish evacuees from Tsarist pogroms in Russia. At the time of their arrival most of these groups suffered hostility of varying degrees but as the generations rolled by they were gradually accepted.

Some of the well-known immigrants and their institutions include Rothschilds, Reuters, Marks and Spencer, Trust House Forte, Tesco, Joseph Conrad, Harold Pinter, Doris Lessing, Simon Schama and Linford Christie.

Kings were imported from Germany and Holland, queens from France and Spain and fighting forces

from the wide world were drafted to fight in World Wars 1 and 2 and then post-WW2 large numbers of workers were actively recruited from the colonies.

As a result of intricate research Winder exposes the manipulations, lies and exaggerations of media accounts of more recent waves of immigration and asylum seekers, e.g. in the Thatcher era, with immigrants making up 4 percent of the population, she gave her vision of what made Britain 'Great' – 9 percent felt there were too many immigrants before she expounded compared with 21 percent who admitted to being worried afterwards. Other examples reveal the actual state of monetary and housing benefits to immigrants which are wildly different from the stories abounding in the media.

Poor bloody foreigners – they're just used as a convenient group, easy to label and point the finger at. Instead of falling for the divide and rule tactics which weaken us all, workers should recognise who their real enemy is and work together to defeat the system that enslaves us all.

J.S.

The Rise and Fall of Communism. By Archie Brown. Bodley Head. 2009. £25.



Archie Brown, an Oxford professor and expert in the subject, begins by defining his terms. By Communism (with a capital C) he means what existed in Russia and 14 other

countries and which still exists in varying degrees today in five of them (China, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba and Laos), characterised by the monopolisation of power by a Communist party, organised on rigidly hierarchical lines and severely disciplined, the state ownership of the main means of production and a top-down command economy. By communism (with a small c) he means the "self-governing, stateless, co-operative society" which the Communist parties proclaimed as their long-term aim – and which was Marx's aim too (and also our, only and immediate, aim, even if we prefer to call it socialism).

Taking this into account, this 700-page tome is an objective account of the coming into being, history and demise in Europe of Communist (what we'd call state capitalist) regimes which he sees as the salient fact of the 20th century. Unfortunately for us genuine communists, apart from the suffering imposed on the workers of the countries concerned, this dragged the name of communism (with a small c) through the mud, so making the task of spreading the idea of a stateless, classless, moneyless society as the alternative to capitalism all the more difficult.

ALB

Rare doings at Camberwell and Muzak to my ears, Past Tense £1.50 and £1 respectively (p&p 50p for one item, 80p for two) from Past Tense, c/o 56a infoshop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17 (cheques to A. Hodson)

Muzak to my ears, the history of canned music, as well as a commentary on its present use, is a welcome reminder of how capitalism penetrates every facet of our lives, perverting and twisting human behaviour to its own sick requirements. Like all Past Tense publications, it is exceptionally reasonably priced and well-presented, as well being informative and novel. The author is fortunately by no means trite enough to suggest a "solution", merely stating the facts and leaving the reader to reach their own conclusions. I think you know ours. *Rare doings in Camberwell* is a local radical history production. It is very wide ranging in its scope, and if there is no mention of the real radicals – social revolutionaries – that is because such are rare birds anywhere.

KAZ

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Meetings

London

at 52 Clapham High St, SW4

Sunday **6 September**, 6.00pm

"The free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves"

Speaker: Jim Lawrie

Wednesday **16 September**, 7.30pm

CAPITALISM OR SOCIALISM?

Public debate between of the Adam Smith Institute (Eamonn Butler) and the Socialist Party (Richard Headicar)

Sunday **20 September**, 6.00pm

OUR OWN WORST ENEMY? – HUMAN NATURE AND SOCIALISM

Speaker: Dick Field

Manchester

ONE-DAY SCHOOL

Saturday **12 September**, 1pm - 5pm

CAPITALISM AND THE CRISIS

THE LATEST RECESSION

Speaker - Adam Buick

CASSANDRAS, JEREMIAHS AND

CHICKEN-LICKENS

Why it's dangerous to hope for the worst.

Speaker - Paddy Shannon

Friends' Meeting House Mount Street

City Centre (next to Central

Library and Manchester Town Hall)

West London

Tuesday **15 September**, 8 pm

TWO YEARS OF CAPITALIST CRISIS

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,

Heathfield Terrace, W4

(nearest tube: Chiswick Park)

Glasgow

Wednesday **16 September**, 8.30pm

THE RISE OF THE BNP

Speaker: R.Donnelly

Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill

Road

Manchester

Monday **28 September**, 8.30 pm

PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM

Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

Socialist Standard

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"The Socialist Party of Great Britain"

The Inhumanity of War



All modern wars are the outcome of economic clashes within Capitalism. As this month is the twentieth anniversary of the outbreak of the last world war, the effects of which are still with us, most of the articles in this issue of the SOCIALIST STANDARD concern the Socialist attitude to war.

War can solve no working class problem. It cuts across the fundamental identity of interest of the workers of the world, setting sections of this class at enmity with each other in the interests of sections of the capitalist class.

War elevates force into the position of arbiter in place of the common human desire for mutual peace and happiness. Its effect is wholly evil. It depraves all the participants by forcing them to concentrate upon the best methods of producing misery and of annihilating each other.

War elevates lying, cheating, disabling and murdering opponents into virtues, confers distinctions upon those who practise these means most successfully.

Young men and women, in their most impressionable

years, have the vile methods of warfare impressed upon them so thoroughly that they lose a balanced outlook on life and are impregnated with the idea that force, with all its baseness, and not reason is the final solution in all problems.

Socialism is completely opposed to war and to what war represents. At the same time it is the only solution to the conditions that breed war. It is a new form of society in which the people of the world will work harmoniously together for their mutual benefit, for there will be neither privilege nor property to cause enmity.

No coercion will be needed in Socialism because each will gain from co-operating harmoniously with his fellows. But it is a new social system that demands understanding of its implications from those who seek to establish it.

With the establishment of Socialism war will disappear and humanity will have taken the first step out of the jungle.

(Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, September 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

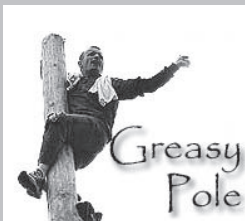
the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Alan Milburn – Days Of Despair

The aftermath of polling in the general election will be a stressful, disorientating time for us as we struggle to adjust to the loss of so many of those we have loved for their readiness to turn back on their promises and distort hard facts. Particularly to be mourned in this way is the Right Honourable Alan Milburn, ex-Secretary of State for Health and Member of Parliament for Darlington. Milburn will not suffer the predicted humiliation at the polls because he announced in June that he would not be standing for Parliament again after a career, notable even among MPs, for its labyrinthine application of the arts of politics. As a child in the little County Durham town of Tow Law, once dependent on its iron works and its coal mines until it was devastated in the slumps of the 1970s and 1980s, he never knew his father and was cared for by his mother. From that – often unpromising – start he blossomed into one of the highest paid Labour MPs with a six figure income from his “extensive outside business interests” (which is perhaps what he meant when he told his constituency Labour Party that he was resigning the seat to give him “the time to pursue challenges other than politics”)

Haze of Dope

“Challenge” is a word too easily used by politicians – especially those who have something awful to disguise. For Milburn, it has been a varying concept, as became obvious when he left Tow Law for the wide, hard world where words mean what the user needs them to, for as long as is useful. He went to study history at Lancaster University (not then feared for any rigorous application in its standards of scholarship). His next challenge was to try for a Ph.D at the rather more expectant Newcastle but this proved beyond his powers of endurance and he gave up – which he ascribes not to any lack of tenacity on his part but to his aversion to studying on his own. So in his twenties he could be found, appropriately shaggy and bearded, jointly running a left-wing bookshop in Newcastle. This hive of delusion advertised itself under the name Days of Hope which was popularly translated as the Haze of Dope.

Declaring himself to be a Marxist or a Trotskyist according to which was the more challenging in the circumstances, Milburn became active in CND and helped run a campaign to save the doomed shipyards of Sunderland. Applying the kind of insidious skills to prove later so useful in the jungle of Westminster, Milburn oozed charm and a consummate ability to exploit the attention of the media. Perhaps he and the other campaigners – not to mention the desperate shipyard workers – were impressed by all of this; if so they overlooked the fact that their opponents could use more cutting and decisive, Bankers in the City at first workers reason for hope abruptly withdrew. Prospective buyers from abroad turned out to be nothing of the kind. The bitter confusion of doubt was finally settled on 7 December 1988 when the Tory minister

Tony Newton told the Commons that the yards would close – “reluctantly, with great regret” he said but then he would, wouldn’t he. Days of Hope it was not.

Influence

This episode might have been instructive for Milburn as an example of how capitalism operates, producing wealth such as ships not as a favour to human beings but as a means of profit for a minority class, so that employment is not a social service but the imposition of wage slavery. This system works in disregard of someone like Milburn and his delusional ability to charm and manipulate. Faced with this cruel reality he chose to blame the failure to defend the shipyards onto his lack of influence, which he would remedy by joining the Labour Party. Moving up the Greasy Pole, from trade union official to MP to junior minister to a seat in the Cabinet he used his “influence” in ways which dismayed many people who were unwise enough to have believed in him; among other labours he oversaw energetic privatisation of Labour’s sacred state health service. Stolidly he supported the war on Iraq, the replacement of Trident, student tuition fees... In this way he earned the recommendation of “leadership material” from the embittered bruiser Charles Clarke but whether this was helpful is a matter for doubt.

Whatever theories Milburn may have spouted to the bookworms of Haze of Dope about influence rightfully stemming from the democratic decisions of the people did not prevent him, after he resigned from being in charge of the Department of Health, taking a £30,000 a year job as consultant to Bridgenorth Capital – a venture capital firm with big interests in the financing of private health companies breaking into the NHS. Notable among these was Alliance Medical which in June 2004, just a year after Milburn had left the Department of Health, was awarded a £95 million contract to supply and operate 12 mobile scanners to the NHS over five years. This nice little earner was signed up to by John Hutton, Milburn’s successor at Health, at a time when many scanners were lying idle because the NHS Trusts could not afford to run them, forcing some patients to travel as much as 20 miles for a scan. A year later the whole scheme was being denounced by doctors as a “disaster” and panicky Labour officials were trying to stop MP Kevin Jones asking questions about it.

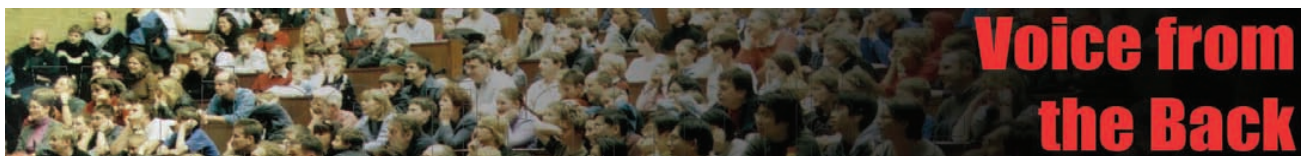
Social Mobility

Milburn’s last fling, before he leaves Parliament in time to evade the ban on MPs holding other jobs, was to chair the grandly titled commission on social mobility, which purported to investigate, and make proposals about, the chances of improving a person’s life prospects. To the customary media hysteria, the commission concluded that a person’s “social mobility” was related to their level of poverty. There is a wealth of evidence which reaches the same conclusion – about education, health, ambition... So what was the point of yet another dead-end enquiry into the ravages of this abominable social system? To provide a discredited Labour leader with the illusory comfort of “influence”?

IVAN



Milburn with Brown



This Is Democracy?

The US government are very fond of lecturing other governments about democracy and extolling the virtues of democracy as opposed to one party regimes. Where it suits their economic interests, such as in oil-rich Middle East states they are less adamant about democracy though. Nevertheless, compared to dictatorship like Saudi Arabia and North Korea, the USA would seem to be a model for the superiority of democracy. However on closer examination the US model is far from perfect. "In 2000, Jon Corzine spent tens of millions of his personal fortune to vault himself from political obscurity to the United States Senate. In 2005, he spent millions more to jump from Washington to Trenton and become New Jersey's governor. This year he's opening his wallet again as he looks to overcome a steep deficit in the polls to win re-election, in what could be the ultimate test of whether money trumps all in politics today. Throughout American history, personal wealth has often played a significant role in winning political office. But as campaigns are increasingly decided by 30-second TV ads and sophisticated get-out-the-vote efforts, the two major parties are increasingly looking to recruit individuals with personal fortunes that can help bankroll campaign costs that now more often than not run into the tens of millions of dollars" (*Yahoo News*, 9 July). In US-style democracy anyone can become politically powerful but it does help if you happen to be a multi-millionaire.

The Power Of Money

It is axiomatic in capitalist society that

if you have more money you eat better than those with less of the stuff. Likewise when it comes to accommodation the rich live in palaces while the poor live in inadequate housing. In education,



recreation and every other human pursuit money allows for the best of everything and consequently lack of the stuff leads to the cheap and the shoddy. A recent example

of this was provided by a review of the treatment of mental health patients in the NHS. "A bleak picture of a mental health service that tolerates bullying and houses children alongside adults in breach of guidelines is revealed in a damning report from a government monitoring body. The Mental Health Act Commission claims many more patient deaths will occur through inadequate staffing and lack of training. The 248-page study, the last by the commission before it is replaced by the new Care Quality Commission, highlights how patients put on suicide watch are often poorly observed, leading to tragedies half-concealed by 'falsification' of nursing records" (*Observer*, 19 July). Needless to say this sort of treatment is reserved for those who cannot afford the luxurious treatment

provided for the very rich. As the Bob Dylan song has it - "Money doesn't talk, it swears!"

Las Vegas, Another View

We are all aware of the Hollywood depiction of Las Vegas as a fun-loving city, full of casinos, nightclubs and good times, but the reality for its growing homeless numbers is far from idyllic. As jobs and homes disappear many of the dispossessed street dwellers are subject to attacks of violence. Now even the streets are being abandoned by the homeless. "Some of the Las Vegas homeless resort to living in a maze of underground flood channels beneath the Strip. There they face flash floods, disease, black widows and dank, pitch-dark conditions, but some tunnel dwellers say life there is better than being harassed and threatened by assailants and the police. 'Out there, anything goes,' said Manny Lang, who has lived in the tunnels for months, recalling the stones and profanities with which a group of teenagers pelted him last winter when he slept above ground. 'But in here, nothing's going to happen to us'" (*New York Times*, 7 August). In one of the most sophisticated urban areas in the world some members of the working class are living like sewer rats. What a hellish system capitalism is.

What lies beneath the fairytale ...



Free Lunch

by Rigg



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Capitalism 2025

US spooks make their predictions



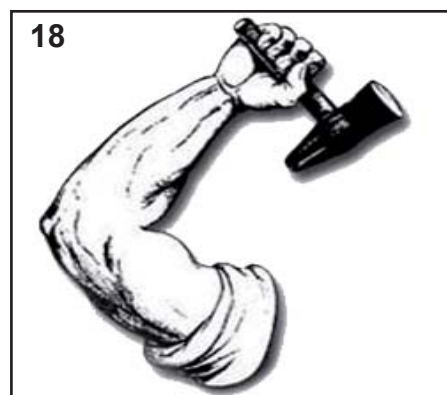
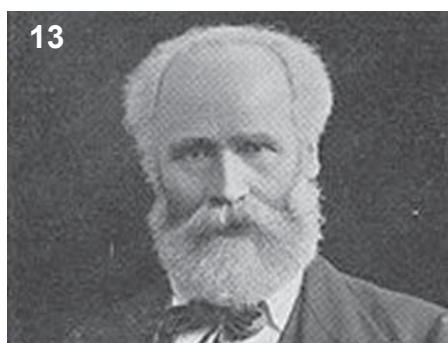
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 3 October** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Capitalism and health care

ON BOTH sides of the Atlantic, the last few months have seen various supposedly alternative models for health care inside capitalism being explored. Barack Obama's review of US health care provision within his first year in office has met a predictably heated response from the paid lobbyists and cheerleaders of the health insurance industry, as well as other sectors of the US capitalist class with something to lose from any change to the status quo.

The costs of individual medical insurance being prohibitive, the poor of this so-called first world nation (46 million of them) are left with Third World levels of care and medical support, and daily "life and debt" decisions.

Whilst there are some differences between the US and UK healthcare system, we shouldn't over-exaggerate them. Heated though the US v NHS debate may be, it is essentially a phoney war. From a world socialist perspective, these are just alternative *capitalist* models for rationing healthcare for the working class.

The US system places a cash register and swipe card console at the foot of your hospital bed. In terms of the immediacy and impact on the patient, the NHS and similar systems in Europe certainly seem a little more 'civilised'. But there is of course still a reckoning somewhere down the line. The 'socialised' systems just remove that decision from the immediacy of the ward. Instead the decision is made at one remove: by an NHS Trust or the government that allocates its funds. The decision isn't made for you as an individual patient, but for your *class* as a

whole, the working class who constitute some 90 percent of the population.

The reason the US administration is looking again at how their system is – or isn't – working, has little to do with how ethical or plain nice it wants its society to be. Instead it is driven by a need to make economies and find the most efficient way to maintain the health of the US workforce. After all, despite the egalitarian claims surrounding it, the introduction of the NHS to the UK had a solid capitalist 'business case' behind it and was supported by all main parties. (The cost to the US state per head of population is now approximately twice that in the UK).

The NHS – and the other examples quoted of 'socialised' medicine (e.g. Scandinavian countries) – are not socialism, which we would argue means a moneyless and wageless economy as a whole. However at an individual and emotional level (rather than at a political level), it would be churlish of world socialists to dismiss out of hand the strong empathy and support for the NHS that most workers in Britain have. It is after all support for free access, for the idea that healthcare be freely available to all regardless of wealth.

At one level, world socialists entirely empathise with this sentiment. But not to the extent of getting caught up in expressing political support for one type of capitalist healthcare system over another: only a social system based on production for use rather than profit for the few, can truly realise this powerful and fundamentally egalitarian desire.



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Is technology making us stupid?

DO YOU ever wonder whether the smarter technology becomes, the dumber and lazier we become?

At one level, of course, this can't be true. Literacy rates in almost all countries are in the high nineties, and the information revolution can scarcely be said to have rendered people more ignorant than they were hundreds of years ago. Advanced capitalism needs workers skilled in the 'knowledge economy', and can scarcely afford for its school indoctrination centres to turn out workers who aren't up to the job.

But still, when you try to have a conversation in a pub with a group of people who are simultaneously writing phone texts, checking their email, Facebook, Twitter accounts and RSS feeds, and looking over your shoulder at the cricket scores on the giant TV screen, while humming along to the rock tune on the in-house speakers, you might be forgiven for thinking that less is sometimes more. It seems as if people don't discuss, think, concentrate, criticise, evaluate. All they're doing is time-slicing in a perpetual multi-tasking environment. What you are dealing with is, arguably, a case of social attention deficit hyperactive disorder. An entire society in need of ritalin.

The world is drowning in an ocean of data, but data is not information and information is not knowledge. Data consists of bytes or small packets, which must be compiled into some kind of order so as to provide meaningful information. Thus the words 'lion', 'fish' and 'eats' are data, while 'lion eats fish' or 'fish eats lion' or 'lionfish eats' are alternative forms of information creatable from the same data.

There is a similar difference between 'information' and 'knowledge'. For knowledge to exist, small pieces of information must be collected and processed into some meaningful agglomeration, like molecules building into more complex organic systems. Knowledge is thus a construct which it takes time, patience, communication and experience to build.

In the Dark Ages, knowledge was a treasure locked up behind monastic walls. In the Middle Ages, it was still the preserve of princes. With the dissolution of the monasteries in Britain knowledge began to be secularised, and the invention of printing revolutionised its spread.

The information revolution which began with printing and has lately accelerated geometrically with the internet has certainly involved a knowledge revolution but the two are not the same and the one does not necessarily entail the other. From a world subdued in ignorance modern workers now face a perpetual storm of information from which it is perhaps becoming harder, not easier, to extract meaningful knowledge.

It is not only the speed and intensity of this 'data rain' which swamps the mind. It is the fact that it is being broken down into smaller and smaller packets,

knowledge being deconstructed, digitised, quantised and miniaturised for faster transmission. And to cope with this onslaught, the mind becomes less reflective and more selective, picking and choosing what it will process according to its preset value judgments, making it less rather than more likely that new ideas will be adopted. Time too is at a premium, and technology is taking knowledge away from the library and the desktop towards the e-reader and the smartphone, from email to Twitter, from debate to mere chat.

Some futurists, like Ray Kurzweil, have been predicting the advent of the Singularity, a technological point beyond which it is not possible to make any predictions at all. The nature of the Singularity is popularly supposed to be the development or evolution of true machine intelligence, but could it be that instead of machine intelligence rising to meet us, we simply sink until we pass it on the way down?

Some say it's Google making us gaga, others that it's screen-burn to the brain. But where most such concerns are merely the same old bourgeois snootiness against youth or the lower orders, socialists have got legitimate reason to worry, because this could all play into the hands of capitalism. The ruling class loves to infantilise us, making us think we're too dumb and childlike to take responsibility for ourselves without their 'guiding' authority. It would be scary to think that this might come to be true.

Our best hope is for a political Singularity, something no techie is predicting. The Zeitgeist Movement appears to be making huge strides in popularising non-market production for use, and another group is calling

for a World Strike against money in 2012. These might grow or they might fizzle out, like the anti-capitalist movement. But for such a post-capitalist society to succeed it cannot be imposed from above or gifted to the world by one or two visionaries. Facebook, Twitter and the blogosphere are all useful means of communicating ideas, but they're not oriented towards what is also necessary: focussed reflection and critical debate. It's not that people are incapable of these abilities, but if they are not accustomed to them they may try to avoid them. The danger is the spread of soundbite socialism at the expense of depth.



All middle class now?

Dear Editors

It must be difficult not to write about stereotypes, but I was never against unions - just the way they operated in a modern democracy. I just felt instead of calling a strike at every opportunity to flex their muscles - which is the headbanger approach - the funds they had should've been used for re-training redundant workers, helping other workers set up cooperatives when companies had failed, create savings for workers and their families injured in accidents, etc; and so on. What really pissed me off was that the union bosses during our dispute - and I since discovered in nearly all other disputes - went on paying themselves handsome salaries and driving their big modern 'I'm not a union official, I'm an executive' cars whilst they waltzed around between meetings as their members froze on the picket line.

It's all bullshit created on the back of the working class' aspirations. Truth is we are a middle class society now, as we were becoming during my dispute, but it paid the power brokers at the top of the Labour movement and the trades unions to keep the old class war going so that they could retain their power bases and their trappings of success.

So I object to being told I was an employer who wanted to run my business without trade union interference. In our case, when the trade union tries to control who you can and can't employ, that's the day that people stop running businesses and get out - which would be great for a wealth creating nation, I think not.

The freedom you have to write your periodical without fear of imprisonment, censorship and even death, is something hard fought for by a capitalist society, or by writers in a suppressed state who fight for the freedom of a democratic state.

There are times journalists shouldn't forget that. A free press is the only watchdog of those who would govern us in both a democratic and an authoritarian state.

The trouble with socialism is that it has its head buried in the satanic mills of a hundred years ago. It needs enlightening. It needs a new vision, not a descent into the madness of a suppressed anarchy that never had a chance of catering to a world of technology and freedom of the mass as well as the individual. There are no new visions, yet the world is crying out for them.

Eddy Shah

PS. I presume your writing your

stuff on technology we introduced during the dispute. Or are you clacking over an old Underwood typewriter and cursing every time the keys stick? Just think, you could've achieved that if the unions had won in 1982. Welcome to the world of the middle class.

Reply:

We too are critical of the knights of the round table at the TUC's Congress House but from a working-class point of view. Unions should be run by their members and officials should not have big salaries, big houses and big cars as many do. We say "working class" deliberately as, for us, this is composed of anyone obliged to get a living by going out and trying to sell their mental and physical energies to some employer. This of course applies to most of the so-called "middle class", as many of them are discovering the hard way as they lose their jobs or see their final salary pension scheme closing. And it is capitalism that forces workers to resist new technologies as a way of trying to protect their livelihoods. If we had socialism nobody would be put in this position. - *Editors.*

Socialism needed

Dear Editors

Re: Starvation in Africa; poverty of many kinds. So very much and sincerely appreciate the *NY Times* September 8, 2009 front-page photo of the starving and dehydrated Kenyans. In a world wherein over 40,000 humans starve to death in disease and degradation each day, these continuous international crises should be making front page news every day.

However in a world where state capitalist dictatorships and state ownership and control, proxies for the owning and ruling class, is confused with socialism, which has yet to exist on Earth, real solutions to the problems of war and starvation are endlessly mired in needlessly convoluted problems of opposing interests that simply mean a dimension of pseudo-intellectually evil data structure remains necessary to describe even mere reformist heuristics.

Socialism, which can only exist the whole world over when the majority of Earth's population first understand classism and capitalism, and comprehend and desire socialism and vote it peacefully, legally and democratically into existence, means the solution to ending all wars,

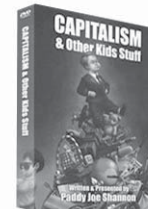
poverty and starvation takes 10 years instead of 1000...but this does not happen unless you, the vast majority of you, understand, desire and vote for socialism, a system of society based upon common ownership of the means and instruments for production and distribution by and in the interests of society as a whole.

So for those reformists who may be exposed to neo-McCarthyism and murdering church violation and prejudice with Earth's trifling little solutions of state-run health care, have no fear. These have nothing to do with socialism or (primitive) communism.

The failed feudalistic dictatorships of Russia and China had a false dream of installation by undemocratic elitism; fascism had a racist, nationalist and proud illusion - state capitalism by another name; the national post office is only an example of state capitalism - not common ownership; humans would like to pretend they are inclusive and democratic and that the tree of knowledge and life have all their fruit intact...the truth is otherwise.

Samantha Morris (by email)

spgb dvd



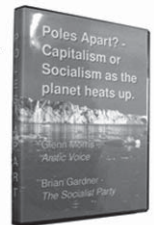
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Poles Apart? Capitalism or Socialism as the planet heats up

with contributions from Glenn Morris, Arctic Voice



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Corrections

In the article on "Japan : the road to Pearl Harbour" in last month's issue we referred to the "Sino-Soviet war of 1894-5". It should of course have been the "Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5".

In *Greasy Pole* in the August issue we misspelled the name of Blackburn Rovers' ground: it should have been spelt "Ewood Park".

Why they keep piling up manure: the psychology of wealth accumulation

Money is like manure. If you spread it around, it does a lot of good, but if you pile it up in one place, it stinks like hell.

I CAN'T trace the original author, but it seems to be a popular motto among rich "philanthropists". It has been attributed, in slightly variant wordings, to steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, oil tycoon J. Paul Getty, New York "socialite" Brooke Astor, Clint W. Murchison (chairman of Tecon Corporation) and Kenneth Langone (founder of The Home Depot).

Two questions spring to mind.

First, if these people so hate the smell of manure, why do they keep piling it up? After all, they are free to stop at any time.

Second, what do they want all that money for anyway? Surely a few hundred million should suffice to buy all the luxuries anyone could want? So why chase after the billions?

An addiction to extravagance

One answer is offered by Eric Schoenberg of Columbia Business School (on the site of *Forbes* magazine). Driving your first Rolls Royce is a fantastic experience, he explains, but as you get used to it you no longer enjoy it so much. So you have to look for new experiences, which for some reason are always more and more expensive.

Presumably, an obsession with money spoils the enjoyment of anything that does not cost a lot of it. The result is an addiction to extravagance that reinforces the drive to make more money.

Kudos

Besides addiction to extravagance, the most common motive for accumulating wealth appears to be simply the desire to be admired by others. Kudos, however, depends less on absolute wealth than on place in the pecking order, as indicated by lists like the *Forbes 400*. Only Number One can feel fully confident of his superior status – and even he must beware of rivals overtaking him.

Astonishing but true: many people honestly think – indeed, assume – that being rich is something worthy of pride and admiration. They consider having more money than anyone else the greatest of all conceivable human achievements. Never mind where the money came from, how it was acquired. To be a "winner" is glorious, to be a "loser" shameful and pitiable. They were brought up to think so, and can hardly imagine that anyone might be sincere in thinking otherwise.

We might expect there to be an element of subtlety or mystery in the driving impulse at the core of a dynamic that spawns so much evil. Instead, we find something insufferably boring and trivial, the ultimate in banality.

The "philanthropists"

And yet the worship of wealth need not wholly exclude other social values. Many people feel that just being rich is not sufficiently

glorious in itself: in addition, one should "do good". As a result, some wealthy individuals wish also to be "great humanitarians and philanthropists".

There is actually a special business that makes money by selling "philanthropic" fame. For a fixed sum you can have a concert hall, museum, hospital, college or whatever named after you (or a relative of yours). For example, Brown University named its Institute of International Studies, where I used to work, in honour of Tom Watson of IBM in exchange for \$25 million.

The publicity given to large "philanthropic" donations suggests that in certain circles kudos may now depend on how much money you give as well as how much you have. It is like the potlatch among the Kwakiutl of western Canada, where the wealthy gain kudos by making generous gifts.

Guilt feelings?

While "philanthropy" is often just a means of cultivating a favourable public image, some wealthy people may be sincere in wanting to "do good". Some authors even attribute the giving of certain individuals to guilt feelings about how their fortunes were made.

Thus, it is claimed that Brooke Astor was ashamed of her family's reputation as New York's biggest slumlords. Carnegie, we are told, felt guilt over the workers killed in the suppression of the Homestead strike of 1892. Yet he also wanted "Carnegie Steel to come out on top" – and that feeling proved stronger than any sense of guilt.

Ashamed or not, Astor gave nothing to the victims of her family's rack-renting. Instead, she gave \$200 million to cultural institutions. Similarly, Carnegie endowed the arts and academia, but gave nothing back to the workers who slaved in the heat of his steel mills at poverty line wages – twelve hours a day, every single day of the year except 4 July

The ruthless capitalist precedes, makes possible and is vindicated by the "generous philanthropist". The capitalist drives the system that causes the misery; the "philanthropist" then does a little to ameliorate that misery. Strangely enough, the capitalist and the "philanthropist" turn out to be one and the same person.

Piling up and spreading out

Why keep piling up manure just to spread it out again? It seems senseless – even if the manure does not end up exactly where it was before.

Yes, it seems senseless when we focus on outcome. But when we shift our attention to process, it starts to make more sense.

Piling up brings one sort of kudos, then spreading out brings another. One sort does not cancel out the other.

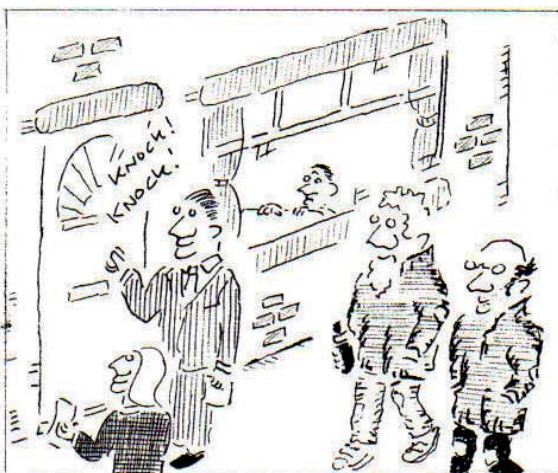
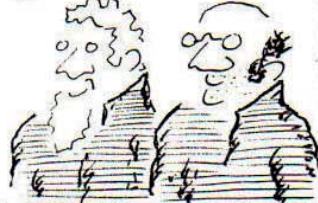
Both piling up and spreading out give the satisfaction of exercising power, making decisions that affect millions of lives – on the sole qualification of the possession of wealth.

So it all makes perfect sense. From a certain point of view.

STEFAN



IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF RELIGION? MAYBE IT SERVES TO MITIGATE THAT AWFUL CONSCIOUSNESS OF DEATH WE HUMANS ARE CURSED WITH. ALTHOUGH HAVING SAID THAT, ATHEISTS DON'T SEEM TO BE RUNNING AROUND TERRIFIED OF THE ETERNAL VOID AWAITING THEM!



NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF THIS CULTURAL BAGGAGE. 'OUR FOREFATHERS BELIEVED IN THIS, - SO SHOULD WE.' THE CENTRAL POINT, TO A RATIONALIST, AS TO WHETHER RELIGION IS ACTUALLY TRUE OR NOT, IS ALMOST BESIDE THE POINT.



PERHAPS RELIGION IS MAINLY A CULTURAL CONSTRUCT. A BADGE OF IDENTITY, - VERY IMPORTANT TO MANY PEOPLE! I'M A SCOT, I'M A GOTH, I'M AN ARSENAL FAN, I'M A MUSLIM, A CATHOLIC, A JEW. IT'S HOW WE DEFINE OURSELVES. TRIBAL BELONGINGS.



IT'S ALL ABOUT 'FAITH', A TRENDY WORD, NOWADAYS. YOU GOTTA HAVE IT! LOOKED AT COOLY THOUGH, FAITH SEEMS TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN THE ABILITY TO FORCE ONESELF TO BELIEVE CHILDISH SUPERSTITION. IS THAT SUCH AN ADMIRABLE TRAIT?

BUT SIR! I WANNA TALK ABOUT THE COMING IMMINENT END DAYS..

... AND I USE THE WORD 'CULT' DELIBERATELY. ALL RELIGION IS DEEPLY STRANGE, LOOKED AT OBJECTIVELY. CULTS MAY SEEM DANGEROUS, OR LAUGHABLE, BUT THEIR ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT THEY CAN'T BOAST THE LONGEVITY, OR MEMBERSHIP, OF THE MAINSTREAM RELIGIONS.



... AND YOU CAN'T WAIT FOR 'EM! I SUPPOSE CHRISTIANITY IS REALLY A STRANGE APOCALYPTIC CULT. YOUR OFFSHOOT IS JUST MORE OPEN, ENTHUSIASTIC, ABOUT IT.



IS RELIGION INCOMPATIBLE WITH SOCIALISM? YES. BECAUSE IN A BASIC WAY, IT REPRESENTS THE ACCEPTANCE OF A SUBMISSIVE ROLE, - THIS DEITY, KING OF KINGS, MASTER, 'LORD' - TELLING CHOICE OF WORD - RULING OVER US FOREVER, UNQUESTIONABLY. IF YOU CAN ACCEPT THAT, YOU MIGHT AS WELL ACCEPT THE RIGHT OF THE GREAT AND THE GOOD TO RULE OVER US. KNOW THY PLACE!



... THEN IT'S MUCH EASIER TO ACCEPT INJUSTICE IN THIS LIFE. WHAT DOES IT MATTER? THE POOR, OPPRESSED, WILL BE REWARDED IN THE NEXT WORLD... ...SO SHOULD MEKKLY ACCEPT THEIR LOT.



PLUS, IF YOU SUBSCRIBE TO A MYSTICAL VIEW OF EXISTENCE, WHERE THIS COLD HARD REALITY IS JUST A PASSING PHASE, A PREPARATION FOR THE REAL THING IN THE AFTERLIFE...



IS IT SAFE TO COME OUT YET?...

FOOD DESTROYED

"Christophe Voivenel is a dairy farmer, and the son of dairy farmers, in one of the finest dairy regions in the world. At some point in the next few days, he will commit an act of sacrilege. He will rise, as usual, at 6am to milk his 60 cows and then throw away the warm, white liquid which is his family's life's blood. 'You have to understand how hard that will be,' he said. 'It is like an artist destroying his own painting or a craftsman smashing one of his own creations.' Mr Voivenel, 43, a farmer near Vire in lower Normandy, is about to go on strike. Tens of thousands of dairy farmers in 14 European countries, including some in Britain, are preparing to join the first ever pan-European 'milk strike': an attempt to push up the farm-gate price of milk, which has almost halved in the last 18 months." (*Independent*, 29 August)

THE FAILURE OF CHARITY

"The spectre of famine has returned to the Horn of Africa nearly a quarter of a century after the world's pop stars gathered to banish it at Live Aid, raising £150m for relief efforts in 1985. Millions of impoverished Ethiopians face the threat of malnutrition and possibly starvation this winter in what is shaping up to be the country's worst food crisis for decades. Estimates of the number of people who need emergency food aid have risen steadily this year from 4.9 million in January to 5.3 million in May and 6.2 million in June. Another 7.5 million are getting aid in return for work on community projects, as part of the National Productive Safety Net Program for people whose food supplies are chronically insecure, bringing the total being fed to 13.7 million." (*Independent*, 30 August)

FOOD NEEDED

"Changing weather patterns have decimated crops in several of the world's poorest countries this year, leaving millions in need of food aid and humanitarian workers warning about the dangerous effects of climate change. Farmers in Nepal have been able to produce only half their usual crop, said an Oxfam International report released last week. Livestock are dying of malnutrition in Yemen, according to the humanitarian news service IRIN. And the Red Cross is bracing for the effects of heavy rains across 16 West and Central African nations. All three are the result of extended atypical weather events – drought, rain, or untimely combinations of both – in places where subsistence farmers have long depended on predictability. In Nepal, more than 3 million people – about 10 percent of the population – will need food aid this year, said Oxfam." (*Yahoo News*, 2 September)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 8th and 22nd. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail: 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

NORTHWEST

Lancaster branch. Meets every Monday 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380

Manchester branch. Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. Tel: 0161 860 7189

Bolton. Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589

Cumbria. Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG

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Todmorden. Keith Scholey, 1 Leevue Ct, Windsor Rd, OL14 5LJ. Tel: 01706 814 149

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

South West branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

EAST ANGLIA

East Anglia branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

Cambridge. Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

NORTHERN IRELAND

Newtownabbey. Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napierhall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

Ayrshire. D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freeuk.com

Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsnweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

Cardiff and District. John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

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Germany. Norbert. E-mail: weltsozialismus@gmx.net

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COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

World Socialist Party of Australia.

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Socialist Party of Canada/Parti

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World Socialist Party (New Zealand)

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States P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. E-mail: wspboston@covad.net

It isn't over till it's over

WHEN THE latest figures for business investment were published at the end of August, pro-capitalist commentators were shocked:

"From April to June businesses spent £29.9 billion on investments, from new computers to vehicles, down 18.4 per cent on last year – the biggest annual drop since records began in 1967. Against the first quarter of the year, investment tumbled 10.4 per cent from £33.3 billion – the steepest quarterly decline in 24 years" (*Times*, 28 August).

Times journalist Ian King commented:

"Normally sober economists, such as Michael Saunders of Citi, reached for the history books as they pointed out that, in terms of total investment, the annual decline this year is likely to be about 18 per cent – the biggest fall, outside wartime, for more than a century. Judging from these numbers, businesses are simply not spending enough to haul the UK out of recession".

Even though it only amounts to between 10 and 14 percent of GDP business investment – essentially what businesses spend, except on wages and land, on renewing production – is what drives the capitalist economy. It is an increase in this, resulting from the reinvestment of profits not just in maintaining but in expanding production, that results in an increase in GDP.

Businesses investment falls either because profits are down (so businesses don't have the money to spend) or because they are not prepared to reinvest all of them as they don't see themselves making a profit from doing so. Both these factors will have contributed to the current fall.

Marx analysed capitalism as a system of capital accumulation where the amount of capital invested increased over time through profits made out of past production being invested as new capital. However, this was not a smooth process but one that proceeded in fits and starts due to fluctuations in business investment.

GDP does not measure capital accumulation directly, but it is the source of income from which new capital is accumulated. In any country where there is no longer any subsistence farming, GDP can only go up if there has been some capital accumulation. If GDP falls this is a sign that capital accumulation has faltered.

The official definition of a recession is a fall in GDP for two consecutive quarters. The initial fall will be the result of a fall in business investment but, as business investment is only about 10 percent of GDP, a relatively big drop in this will be reflected only as a small fall in GDP. Thus a fall of 10 percent in business investment will reflect itself as a fall of only 1 percent of GDP. (In fact it will be larger as businesses will also be reducing their outlay on wages, another component of GDP).

When quarterly GDP increases again (as it will) politicians and the media will proclaim the end of the recession. But this will only mean that the bottom has been reached, not that it is over. It won't really be over until business investment and GDP reach the levels they were at before the recession began. As GDP has fallen 5.7 percent since the recession began this will be many quarters later.

At the moment the big argument amongst economists and business analysts is what shape the whole episode will turn out to have. The optimists are hoping that it will be V-shaped (i.e. a fairly rapid return to pre-recession levels). Others see it as being more like a tick (i.e. a slower recovery). The pessimists see it like a W (i.e. a double dip, a initial small recovery followed by second fall).

If the worst events can bring out the best in people, why can't that impulse be sustained in everyday life? As Solnit notes, "the real question is not why this brief paradise of mutual aid and altruism appears but rather why it is ordinarily overwhelmed by another world order."

<http://tinyurl.com/mcp52d>

The United States spent \$75 billion over the past year to finance worldwide intelligence operations that employ 200,000 people, according to an unprecedented disclosure by the nation's top intelligence official:

<http://tinyurl.com/ml2t9s>

At the Charter School for Excellence, a school in South Florida inspired by Gothard's draconian principles that receives \$800,000 in state funds each year, children are indoctrinated into a culture of absolute submission to authority almost as soon as they learn to speak. A song that the school's first-graders are required to recite goes as follows:

Obedience is listening attentively,
Obedience will take instructions joyfully,
Obedience heeds wishes of authorities,
Obedience will follow orders instantly.
For when I am busy at my work or play,
And someone calls my name, I'll answer right away!
I'll be ready with a smile to go the extra mile
As soon as I can say "Yes, sir!" "Yes ma am!"
Hup, two, three!

<http://tinyurl.com/pqnolw>

New research indicates that 80% of Afghanistan now has a permanent Taliban presence and that 97% of the country has "substantial Taliban activity."

<http://tinyurl.com/m757ex>

Are you totally reprehensible and feeling lonely? Or maybe you're just a struggling business looking for some instant online companionship? The firm Usocial has the answer for you -- buy Facebook friends and fans:

<http://tinyurl.com/mvmwdf>

"But why should we hear about body bags, and deaths, and how many, what day it's gonna happen, and how many this or what do you suppose? Or, I mean, it's, it's not relevant. So, why should I waste my beautiful mind on something like that?" : Barbara Bush on ABC - Good Morning America, March 18, 2003....Six years later.... The Obama administration's freak out... over the circulation of a photograph of a dying US soldier in Afghanistan..

<http://tinyurl.com/qthse5>

A millionaire in northern China paid four million yuan (600,000 dollars) for a dog and ordered 30 luxury cars to come to the airport to greet her and the animal:

<http://tinyurl.com/r2vr7p>



GLOBAL TRENDS 2025: A TRANSFORMED WORLD

‘Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World’

The United States ‘intelligence community’ has recently produced a report giving a strategic overview of current geopolitical and economic trends, and mapping out potential scenarios by the year 2025. The U.S. is militarily and economically pre-eminent in the world, and the aim of the report is to guide strategic thinking and inspire political action on behalf of the U.S. ruling class and its allies.

TO MAKE it less incestuous, certain academics, consulting firms and think-tanks were invited to participate. These include the Atlantic Council of the United States, the Wilson Center, RAND Corporation, the Brookings Institution, American Enterprise Institute, Texas A&M University, the Council on Foreign Relations and Chatham House in London.

The report is declassified and available to read online (http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html), which means it is considered safe for public consumption. The specific plans for action resulting from it will no doubt be on a strictly ‘need to know’ basis. There is enough material to fill several issues of this magazine, so we will look at one broad theme: increasing authoritarianism and its implications for democracy.

The Chairman’s preamble notes that the study seeks to “identify opportunities for policy intervention ... (which) ... can decrease the likelihood and severity of negative developments and increase the likelihood of positive ones.” So, what do they consider to be ‘negative’ and ‘positive’? The plans do not prioritise, for example, alleviating world hunger, preventing war or cutting the emissions that cause global warming (even though going over the climatic tipping point is recognised as a possibility). No. The ruling class concern is how they can continue to protect their interests as these disasters that their system is causing unfold. Their predictions are to some extent their intentions, and we can stand warned about what to expect from them.

Nation States

The global financial crisis is seen as accelerating processes already underway and the report calls for “long-term efforts to establish a new international system.” (p.11) As the Cold War era gave way to a unipolar order of American hegemony, in which the U.S. became the self-appointed policeman of the world, this too may have to give way and be replaced by a multipolar international system, with strong regional blocks centred in North America, Europe and Asia. China and India, in particular, are expected to have further economic growth and greater regional and world influence. However, this is also expected to cause (or exacerbate) certain problems. Concerning oil and gas resources, and also food and water (partly due to climate change), “demand is projected to outstrip easily available supplies over the next decade or so.” (p.viii) It is predicted that nation states will therefore be taking greater protectionist measures up to and including war.

Capitalism is based on ownership and control by the minority capitalist class, ruthless exploitation of the majority for profit, and thus competition. In this system, the nation state is a mechanism used by capitalists to protect – and extend – their dominion as owners and rulers, and this has always led to international strife. As resources dwindle, due to pollution, over exploitation and climate change – or easily accessible supplies (those that are profitable) are used up – competition and thus conflict can be expected to intensify.

The report’s authors “remain optimistic about the

long-term prospects for greater democratization, but advances are likely to slow and globalization will subject many recently democratized countries to increasing social and economic pressures that could undermine liberal institutions.” (p.87) This is something the rich and powerful know all about. U.S. and U.K. governments have regularly intervened to disrupt and sometimes overthrow democratic institutions and to support the installation of military dictatorships when it has been considered good for making money/establishing strategic positions. Such foreign policy has frequently resulted in pro-democracy campaigners being beaten or shot in the street or hunted down, tortured, and imprisoned. U.S. supported coups (and attempted coups) specifically to remove elected governments include: Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, Chile 1973, Nicaragua 1981, Grenada 1983, Panama 1989, Algeria 1992, Haiti 1994-2000, Venezuela 2002, and Bolivia 2008 (for a full list of interventions see <http://tiny.cc/mm8kL>) Interestingly, in Venezuela and Bolivia the elected government has been retained due to popular pressure.

Democracy is used by the ruling class as both shield and sword: as a cover (legitimation) for the continuing rule of the minority class, and when useful as a justification for aggression against other nation states. Whilst it was suddenly imperative for oil-rich Iraq to be ‘democratised’ by operation ‘Iraqi Freedom’, non-democratic regimes that are ‘friendly’ to U.S. business, such as Saudi Arabia, are not deemed to be a problem.

State capitalism

There is speculation in the report that economic success for China may lead to other countries adopting state capitalist authoritarianism; which means the state taking a more direct and prominent role in economic management. This might be a regional phenomenon, or become more widespread. It is suggested that a trade-off could occur with domestic populations; the promise of more ‘security’ and ‘economic success’ in return for less democracy. In a complex world of economic crisis, environmental catastrophe and war over resources, democracy may come to be (or is already being) regarded as too unpredictable and uncontrollable – and may

come to be presented to the populace as such. The report notes a “questioning among elites over the ability of democratic governments to take the bold actions necessary to deal rapidly and effectively with the growing number of transnational challenges.” (p.87)

This “questioning among the elites” has long since gone over into action in the U.S. and elsewhere. The enhanced state powers that have been taken following the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001 marked a speeding-up of processes already underway. In the U.S. we have seen the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, and the passing of the USA Patriot Act. The latter has legalised greater surveillance of telephone

and internet users, searches of premises without consent or knowledge, access without a court order to financial records, library records etc. and indefinite detention of immigrants. This has been accompanied by an increasingly restrictive appeals process in the U.S. judiciary system.

Other countries have also been expanding their anti-terrorism legislation and law enforcement powers. Two significant trends are 1) the broad application of terrorist legislation and 2) moves that have been taken to exclude people who have been labelled as terrorists from having the protections conferred by national and international law such as the right to an open trial. Of course, a state of war – and the ‘War on Terror’ will do – anyway allows for martial law to be imposed by democratic governments on behalf of the capitalist class whenever they see fit.

The report says that “terrorism is unlikely to disappear by 2025.” (p.iv) Given that terrorism is an inevitable consequence of capitalist competition, this is no surprise. And the possibility as well as the actuality of terrorism is a useful propaganda tool. It serves to justify the diminishing of democratic rights – all in the name of defending democracy – and to keep domestic populations sufficiently supportive of state terrorism being carried out by certain liberal democracies (often the U.S. with the U.K. helping) in various parts of the world. We are also told that “counterterrorism and counterinsurgency missions increasingly will involve urban operations as a result of greater urbanization,”

“It is predicted that nation states will therefore be taking greater protectionist measures up to and including war.”



U.S. supported coups to remove elected governments include (left) Iran 1953, and (below) Grenada, 1983



including domestically (p70). This accords with the present trend for an increasing percentage of civilian casualties in war.

The capitalist class (or significant sections of it) certainly seems to be preparing to deal with the kind of threats to their system that would be posed by the unrest and disruption that could result from greater societal dysfunction, and also perhaps from the growth of informed types of rebellion that locate the source of our problems as being the profit system itself. The burgeoning of information sharing through the World Wide Web may be something in particular that worries the capitalist class. For a considerable time in the West, propagating deception and distraction has helped to keep the majority of workers compliant, but we should not doubt that the more overtly violent and oppressive techniques that have been used to pursue ruling class interests elsewhere in the world will also be used to control people in the West if it is deemed necessary by the ruling class, and if they can get away with it.

And, to an extent, they are already getting away with it, including in the U.K. As well as the measures mentioned above – and in some cases in close association with them – trade union rights have been neutered or removed, local government has become even more geared to meeting central government targets than meeting local needs, restrictions have been placed on the right to protest, the incidence of ‘stop and search’ by the police has greatly increased and the length of time which people can be detained without charge has been extended. Generally in the West ever larger numbers of people are being criminalized and imprisoned. Hard-won civil liberties and human rights have been removed or limited by law at an accelerated rate during the last few years, and the process isn’t over yet. There are advanced plans for ID cards, yet more CCTV cameras, and further surveillance of telephone and internet use. For the capitalist class, enemies are not just rival capitalists, capitalist groups or states: the enemy also resides ‘within’ – it is us, the working class majority of wage and salary earners.

Alienation

The report notes that “surveys show growing frustration with the current workings of democratic government ...” (p.87), which is not surprising given the current level of democratic deficit. Alienation from existing institutions has profound and diverse effects in society, and changes of popular mood and action may be unpredictable. This presents a potential threat to those in power, but for the moment they have been presented with an opportunity. Lack of democratic involvement has itself resulted in growing apathy and lack of political awareness, which in turn results in the unwitting acceptance of democratic erosions and a grudging acquiescence to authoritarian methods. Unfortunately, in capitalist style democracy, it is *democracy* that is often blamed for not fulfilling the promise, instead of the capitalist structures that place such severe limits upon its function.

Within capitalist limits, democracy exists in a state of flux; the balance altering according to the relative strength of the contending classes, and to the different forces in the capitalist class. Amongst themselves the capitalist class have found use for democracy in solving

disputes. However, concerning wider democracy, the more quiescent we are and the more an alternative to the existing system is deemed to be unrealistic or impossible (the more that capitalist indoctrination is successful), the more we stand to lose that bit of democratic space we do possess. Where it exists, the right to vote has been won through direct pressure, and conceded by members of the ruling class who could see the potential of a more inclusive electoral process conferring legitimacy to minority class rule. Subsequently the use of the concept of democracy in the ideological struggle has helped to establish it around the world. However, since so much propaganda (and hypocrisy) has been expended on extolling its virtues, it might prove difficult to switch off.

Even the better democracies existing in capitalism come nowhere near to fulfilling the potential of what democracy can actually be. What we have presently is a system in which wealth is concentrated in the hands of a minority, who therefore have most of the power –

including in the media. ‘Free speech’ in these conditions simply means that the wealthy – the rulers – still get to put their view foremost and have so far convinced the electorate to faithfully return capitalist parties to parliament.

Democratic theory

Democracy comes from Greek: ‘demos’ and ‘kratia’. It essentially means ‘people power’ or ‘rule by the people’, i.e. it is about the majority being able to make decisions and put them into effect. Mainstream political theory and practice tries to separate ‘politics’ from ‘economics’. ‘Political democracy’ is allowed in an approved form, but economic democracy is impossible because of economic inequality; the majority are deprived of ownership and control of the means of life.

As long as capitalism continues the working class will continue to be exploited for profit, and the system will continue to give rise to waste, war, poverty and famine. The capitalist class will continue to claim that the aim of their actions is to relieve us of these dire conditions, whereas in actual fact their profit-making policies only perpetuate them. For all the expected changes indicated in the report, what we see is business as usual. As such, there are tactical decisions to be made, and we can rest assured that other power blocs have similar concerns. What the thieves are bothered about is that other groups of thieves will take their bounty – or at least take too great a share – or worse still, that the workers will recognise them for what they are and unite to emancipate themselves.

‘Global Trends 2025’ is the capitalist version of the immediate future, but we do not have to be passive recipients of this. It benefits the workers of the world to organise to defend and extend democratic rights; to widen the democratic space as much as possible. For democracy is the way in which we can unite to free ourselves from the insanity of the profit-system and domination by a minority ruling class. We can replace oppression with equality, waste of resources with production directly for use, and systemic competition with cooperation for the common good. We can create the world that we want, fashioned by the majority, in the interests of the majority.

LB/RW

“Surveys show growing frustration with the current workings of democratic government”

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ILP

With proposals to set up a united leftwing party to challenge Labour, we look at a previous attempt at this.

The Independent Labour Party was born on 13 January 1893 in the Labour Institute, Peckover Street, Bradford. The birth was the culmination of a series of efforts dating back to the creation of the Scottish Labour Party some five years earlier. From the spring of 1891 local 'Labour Unions' were formed, with the similar Manchester and Salford Independent Labour Party following in May 1892. The party and its predecessors were primarily the offspring of James Keir Hardie, ILP chairman 1893 to 1900 and long time (1887-1904) editor of *The Labour Leader*. Hardie had launched his paper (it remained his personal property until 1904 when it was taken over directly by the party) in January 1887 and it would remain the focus of the ILP activity through several renamings (becoming *The New Leader* in 1922 and *The Socialist Leader* in 1946) until its termination in the late '70s. Essentially the party was a radical split from the Liberal Party and its ideology and outlook were determined by this.

The early ILP's conception of socialism was a bit of a joke. In 1896 Hardie defined it as "...brotherhood, fraternity, love thy neighbour as thyself, peace on earth, goodwill towards men, and glory to God in the highest" (*Justice*, 6 June 1896). While, in a 1903 letter to Edward Carpenter (quoted in Stanley Pierson's *British Socialism*) John Bruce Glasier, a near-forgotten ILP bigwig, more obscurely referred to socialism as "a power that began with the beginning of the world and permeates infinitude". I fear he may have been confusing socialism with some form of quantum physics.

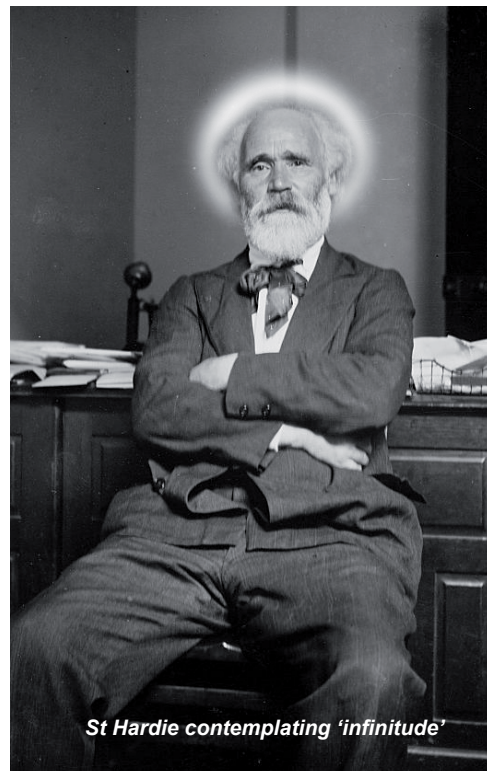
Despite its talk of peace and brotherhood, this is what Glasier, then Party Chairman, said at the 1903 Conference:

"Our foreign trade is flagging; our internal freedom and external defence are less secure; our military glory is dimmer; our national character, our literature, our science, our inventions are in less repute; our young and virile population is quitting the country as if it were a sinking ship, and we are getting in pauper aliens and rich predatory aliens instead."

The ILP was oriented towards parliament from its inception. Hardie had been elected for West Ham South in 1892 but it was not until the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 that the real breakthrough occurred. The LRC, renamed the Labour Party in 1906, was essentially a tactical move of the formerly Liberal-orientated trade unions but until 1918

the political input was very much from the ILP. In 1906 the party scored seven MPs with a further eleven being trade union endorsed members.

The early strongholds of the ILP were as one might expect in the old industrial zones of West Yorkshire and South Lancashire with considerable support in Leicester, Norwich and Merthyr Tydfil. Scotland, later known as the heartland of the ILP, was to develop later during and after the First World War.



St Hardie contemplating 'infinitude'

First World War

If the ILP ever got anything right it was by accident and this is seen most obviously in its attitude to the First World War. Opposition to the 1914-18 war was clearly the correct policy: it is now generally admitted that it was an imperialist war, fought not for 'freedom' but for economic reasons. During the early months of the war Ramsay MacDonald (as might be expected) but also Keir Hardie (as might not be) encouraged young men to enlist. Despite this wobbling the ILP should be acknowledged as the largest organisation in Britain in opposition to the war and both Hardie and MacDonald came out against the war. However its policy originated in a faulty concept of what the war was all about. In a contemporary leaflet the ILP argued that the war was "a diplomatist's war, made by about half-a-dozen men...we sit down and ask ourselves... 'Why has this war happened?' the only answer we can give is, because Sir Edward Grey has guided our foreign policy during the past eight years." (Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left*, p. 45). That Sir Edward, what a bastard.

Such a conspiratorial theory blended well with the wet pacifism endemic in the lower ranks and the antagonism to Tsarist Russia. But the diplomatic cause theory was

to cause problems for the ILP, as it attracted a host of golden daffodils in the shape of the Union of Democratic Control. The UDC essentially consisted of Liberals, some high ranking who wished for a more democratic and open foreign policy. They also viewed the war as caused by secret diplomacy. The bourgeois intellectuals of the UDC, including HN Brailsford, migrated into the ILP diluting the Northern spit and sawdust of the early party and providing the germ of the London based 'intellectual' (wobbly) ILP of the 1930s and after.

The First World War saw the ILP gain a Red reputation with its somewhat half-hearted backing of the Russian Revolution and its incidental association with the 'Red Clydeside' strikers. The war also saw the death of Hardie in late 1915 and the rise of James Maxton.

Golden Age

Before the First World War the ILP and the Labour Party were pretty much identical. The ILP leaders, notably Ramsay MacDonald (ILP Chairman 1906-9), were also those of the Labour Party. The 1918 constitution, particularly through the introduction of local Labour Parties, redefined the Labour Party not just as a political wing of the trade unions but as a party in itself. As a result the ILP had to redefine itself and in the 1920s its role came to be that of the left wing of the Labour Party. At first such a role was of considerable use to the party. Boosted by the 'successes' of the Labour Party, the ILP reached unprecedented heights in 1926 with an all-time high of 60,000 members in 1075 branches and a *New Leader* circulation of 70-80,000. Three years later the ILP had 37 MPs plus another 123 who were members of the party standing under other endorsement.

In 1924, to mark the new left turn, the ILP issued the report of its Socialist Plan Committee. Also known as "Socialism in our time", this became the basis of ILP policy. It defined socialism as the establishment of "a minimum living income" and the "nationalisation of the pivots of capitalism" (i.e. "the banking system, land, mining, electrical generation and distribution, and transport." (Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left*, p. 148) In other words a typical confection of Leftist pseudo-socialism. With the exception of nationalisation of land and the minimum wage this was essentially the programme adopted by the Labour Party in the late 30s and carried out by the 1945-51 government. Given this it might well be asked, "what was the point of the continued existence of the ILP?" The answer is not a lot as we shall see.

Disaffiliation

Something very bizarre happened to the ILP in the early 1930s. Ordinarily the left wing acts as the shock troops of the Labour Party, brought out at election time to do donkey work for a small pay off after. Despite grumbling this usually works well. However occasionally the left gets ideas above its station - the Militant case is typical - or revolts at the unpleasant doings of the Parliamentary party. In this case the particular left of the era receives the order of the boot. They never want to go despite the sniping and grumbling and the parting is acrimonious. After the McDonald debacle however the ILP left voluntarily. This turned out to be a ghastly mistake from their point of view.

Officially the issue at stake was over Standing Orders - whether ILP MPs should without fail follow the Labour Party line. The ILP MPs, led by Maxton, essentially wanted freedom of action - to justify their separate existence as much as anything else.

The PLP wanted (as well it might) loyalty in exchange for endorsement (which essentially meant actually getting elected). Neither side was willing to give way, leading to an inevitable break. However behind this was the looming shadow of MacDonald. Disaffiliation occurred in the summer of 1932. MacDonald had formed his National Government with his power-hungry toadies and the Tories the previous year. The Labour Party was badly split and in severe disarray. A major realignment seemed certain. To the ILPers it seemed as if their time had come.

After disaffiliation the ILP clearly didn't know what to do. Archibald Fenner Brockway, darling of the old left and big cheese of the '30s ILP, remarked: "Since 1932 the Party has been a crucible of the change from reformism to revolutionism" (*Inside the Left*, p. 237). 'Revolutionism' clearly meant desperately jobbing around for popular leftwing causes. In the course of the seven remaining years of the 30s the ILP

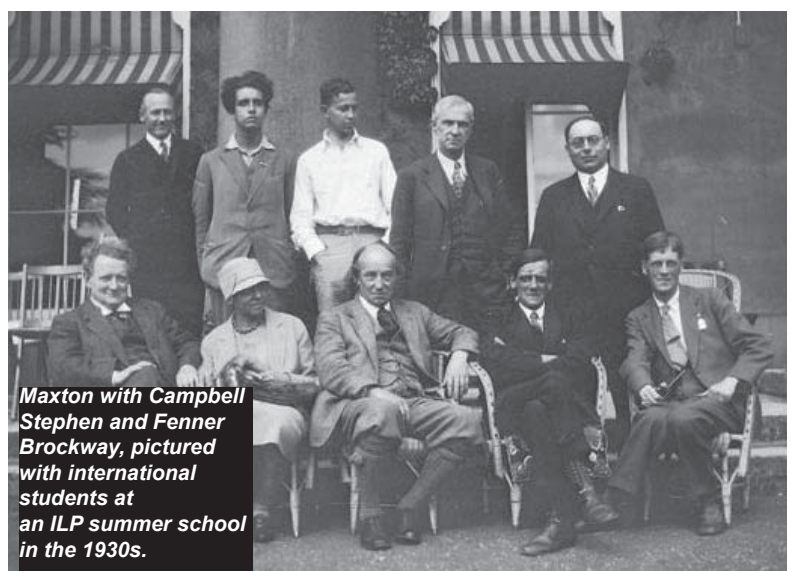
"experimented in many directions, at one time approaching the Communist International, and at another moving towards the Trotskyist position, at one stage attaching its hope to united fronts and at another reverting to purism, at one period going all out to prepare for Soviets and at another recognising again the value of Parliament." (*Inside the Left*, p. 237)

Reflecting this uncertainty of orientation and plagued by internal factions (pro- and anti-CPGB and Trotskyist) membership plummeted. Immediately before disaffiliation the ILP had 16,700 members in 653 branches. By 1935, just three years later this was down to 4,400 members in 284 branches. This was a particularly dramatic decline given the ongoing depression which had boosted almost all other left wing groups and the ILP's relatively firm handling of Spain (sending a contingent including George Orwell) and fascism (giving important backing during the Battle of Cable Street).

Despite this the ILP retained local predominance in parts of Glasgow with numerous local councillors and a range of MPs. This was partly due to an electoral pact with Big Labour and lasted until around 1950. There were other residual centres of strength including Merthyr, Bradford, Norwich, Derby and rather bizarrely Great Yarmouth (where one LF Bunnewell was ILP councillor from 1937 to after 1975).

Second World War and after

The ILP recognised the Second World War as basically a conflict between rival capitalists. However confusion remained. The ILP's 'Peace Terms' were: 1. Self determination of 'peoples', 2. Subordination of



nations to 'international unity' and 3. "The establishment of an international economic organisation for the distribution of the world's resources according to the needs of all peoples". All of which displays the ILP failure to recognise that whilst the world's resources are still owned and controlled by the capitalist class, conflicts between sections of that class are inevitable.

The 1945 election was rather successful for the ILP with three candidates, James Maxton, George McGovern and the Reverend Campbell Stephen, elected (one more than the Communist Party). Fresh with a new influx the ILP seemed set for revival. The success was not to last.

Maxton died little less than a year later. The following year his replacement, James Carmichael joined up with Big Labour. As did McGovern and Campbell. Fenner Brockway also took the jump, in 1947. Maxton had clearly been holding the party together and without him the thing fell apart. Re-affiliation might have saved the day. In 1945 it had knocked on Labour's door, asking very politely for re-affiliation, but Labour (sensibly) didn't open it.

Left out in the cold the ILP fished around for other potential alliances including with us. At the 1947 Conference a motion proposed 'loose links' and joint campaigns (peace, colonial freedom and other 'causes') with the Anarchist Federation, the Commonwealth Party and the SPGB. We said no. Further proposals were made in 1954 ("Need for a United Socialist Party") and late 1957. We debated representatives of the ILP, including in 1928 Maxton himself, on numerous occasions throughout its career, the last being in Bolton in 1972.

The ILP gradually faded from view. It soldiered on however until someone let it back in. In 1975 it re-entered the Labour Party as Independent Labour Publications. Actually this was a bit of a cheat as individual members joined up and on 31 March 1975 the party as such declared itself terminated (a similar thing happened to the trotskyst Revolutionary Communist Party in 1949).

Despite the fact that the Independent Labour Party does not now exist, its ghost may be found haunting Left wing shindigs and the like. It remains well thought of by Leftists of a historical bent, but clearly not well remembered.

KAZ

The disease that is capitalism

What's better - treating the symptoms or dealing with the cause?

When a person is ill a competent doctor will attempt to identify all relevant symptoms: high temperature, site of aches and pains, loss of appetite, heart-rate, blood pressure, etc. etc. Following diagnosis, treatment will be offered in the form of dietary advice, physiotherapy, drugs, surgery or some combination of these or other remedies. If the aim is to cure the illness and prevent its return then the causes of the disease will need to be identified and eliminated. Effective treatment can only follow correct diagnosis of the cause. The doctor will seek to understand family history, working conditions, living conditions, e.g. is the patient living in an area threatened by any form of pollution, etc. Regular check-ups and preventive care are the surest way to avoid the onset of serious illness and an appropriate regimen leading to a healthy lifestyle will more likely ensure non-return of the previous disease.

Political commentary on and diagnosis of society's ills, however, tend to focus on discussion of how to treat the symptoms with scant regard to eliminating the causes. Reform rather than structural change. There continues to be a plethora of books published both criticising and offering reforms to the capitalist sys-

tem; so many, in fact, that it points to the fact that there is a large audience of readers dissatisfied with the status quo, knowing the current system doesn't work for them. An audience aspiring to structural changes?

One World, Ready or Not - The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism by William Greider (US writer on economics and politics over several decades, contributor to *The Nation* and former editor of *Rolling Stone*) is one such book. Greider succeeds brilliantly in proving his contention that the global economy is sowing "creative destruction" everywhere by explaining symptom after symptom of capitalism's failure of the majority. What are some of the symptoms of the disease that is capitalism? Widening gaps between haves and have-nots; rising poverty nationally and internationally; rising unemployment - ditto; no lasting gains from union activity extending over a century; a ban on unionised work in many countries; more temporary workers replacing former permanent positions; increasing poverty, hunger and homelessness; declining health care for many; serious environmental problems, etc. etc. Greider exposes all these symptoms and more with detailed background evidence and numerous examples from most parts



How healthy is your economic system?

of the globe.

The book is a fine resource of investigation and enlightening statistics including details of interviews with workers, corporate CEOs, government officials and economists. Common cures (reforms) recommended include regulating finance capital, increasing, decreasing or shifting the weighting ratio of tax from one sector to another, regulating trade differently, implementing and honouring stronger workers' and



Above: the author. Right: his book

human rights, the restructuring of the World Bank, the IMF and central banks. Greider's recommendations here can be likened to increasing the dose of palliative medicines without treating the cause. Implement radical reforms of the system in an attempt to rein in the most divisive runaway aspects of capitalism (the most invasive aspects of the disease) but leave the system in place and hope it won't run amok again or get hijacked by more pesky capitalists at a later date.

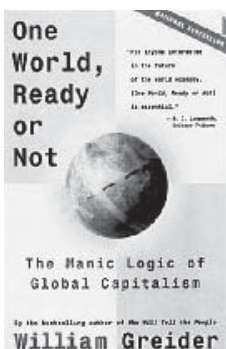
Treating only the symptoms, i.e. reforming the system, is ultimately doomed to failure in society as in the patient. Capital has no interest in that which is not in its own interest. Governments are limited in their ability to implement reforms anyway as they are pulled in various directions by the power of capital's demands and the need to appease their constituents enough to remain in power in the short term. Greider's proposed reforms are laid out with the caveat that he has no expectations that any of them would be implemented (in his case by the US government) and with the additional observation that much of what the government does is useless or harmful to broadly shared prosperity. In other words it allows or even encourages the disease to spread. Markets, money and money markets don't play by rules endorsed or understood by consumers.

"Whilst claiming to promote human freedom capitalism profits concretely from the denial of freedom, especially of the workers employed by capitalist enterprise."

"Consumer boycotts can be an

effective way to mobilise the political issue but the true target should be the systems of human repression." - There - he said it!

Social consequences are largely ignored by capital. Evidence of this is everywhere from the countries with the richest economies to dirt-poor nations with all populations exploited or deliberately abandoned for economic reasons by local and global capital. More families and individuals are impoverished, hungry and



made homeless each successive year in countries from Africa, Asia, Europe to the Americas and the general public are afraid that they, too, may fall victim to the disease as they tighten their belts and try and

take precautions; but they have been taught to see capitalism as a system "too big to fail." They have also been taught to be afraid of considering the alternative of dismantling the system and they continue to shout "reform." Yes, they willingly keep taking the palliative medicine rather than working together to eradicate the disease for the benefit of themselves and future generations.

Greider's final chapter includes some notes on possible surgery and examples of individuals giving out preventive advice; promoting true sustainable development; evidence from environmental technologists which confirms that saving the world is possible at such time that there is steady-state equilibrium with the natural world. This surgery is possible but not on any agenda to be undertaken by the monetary, for-profit, capitalist system.

What needs to be recognised much more widely is that the whole set-up (capitalism/the free-market economy/monetarism) is one enormous scam against those who produce the wealth, whether globally or locally. Those who produce the wealth are currently all part of a huge lottery; this year, this place, I'm in work; next year, some other place, maybe you'll be in work. But, just like a game of chance, some manage to stay lucky and others never get a look in. If you are one of the multitude who has needed to work in order to live, you have been duped. The causes of the disease have been identified. It's time to remove them completely. Only a structural change will do.

JS

Big Brother and the Robots

A few weeks ago the Party held a meeting in London entitled 'Here Come the Robots'. It was a look at the impact and implications of technological advance on society. A lively discussion followed with various opinions and reservations expressed.

Few people would deny that among the changes technology has brought there have been tremendous improvements to our productive capabilities, if not always to our personal circumstances, or that in a socialist society modern technology will be vital in making sure everyone gets adequate food, housing and medical care.

Not everyone is happy with the intrusions and impositions made on our lives by new technology, however, or the fact that many of us



seem content to be constantly connected to our computers, mobile phones or iPods. "Don't people read books anymore?" asked one visitor, and he was not entirely reassured when it was pointed out that it is now possible to walk round with a digital bookcase of books in your pocket.

The question that concerns most of us, of course, is who is in control of all this technology? Under capitalism, it's not us. A couple of stories recently in the papers highlighted the question. Ironically, the first one concerned George Orwell's novel, *1984*. "Big brother would have approved", said the article. (*Guardian*, 20 July).

In a mix-up over copyright, Amazon, the online booksellers, have, without warning, used their remote technology to erase customers' digital copies of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*. The cost of the books, which had been bought and paid for, was refunded we are assured. But how reassuring is it to know that someone, at an anonymous desk somewhere has the power to do that? In Orwell's novel a device known as a "memory hole" was used to eradicate unapproved literature. Amazon can do the same, it seems, at the touch of a computer keyboard.

The second story is nothing to do with fiction. It involves the latest must-have military toy being tested by the US army. Unfortunately, this is no high-tech cuddly teddy bear.

Rumours have been coming out about the Energetically Autonomous Tactical Robot (EATR for short) an unstoppable military robot that powers itself by devouring any organic material in its path - trees, grass and even, according to some reports, dead bodies on the battlefield.

Its inventors are horrified that such suggestions have been made. Although the EATR does indeed power itself on organic material, it is not intended to be fuelled by dead soldiers they say. "We completely understand the public's concern about futuristic robots feeding on the human population, but that is not our mission" they assure us in the *Guardian* article (21 July).

The machine apparently has a built-in system which helps it determine the nature of the material being ingested. And according to Dr Robert Finkelstein, one of its inventors, "If it's not on the menu, it's not going to eat it".

It's all about good taste, then?

NW

New roots of conflict

We have had two world wars and countless local conflicts over the struggle for raw materials, trade routes and spheres of influence. Capitalism is a competitive society and the logical outcome of the resultant conflict is military violence.

The first world war was based on the struggle for colonies as well as access to the coal, iron and steel of Europe. It led to the collapse of governments, thrones and empires, and the redrawing of national borders. More importantly to the world's working class it led to mass destruction, death and injury. It was depicted in this country as a war against militarism and in defence of freedom. Shortly after the cessation of that war the

British working class was to enjoy the freedom of the labour exchange and slum housing. The "war to end all wars" saved the British capitalist class from the encroachment on its markets and empire by its German rivals.

The second world war with its advanced armaments was to bring the horror of war home to the civilian population as never before, with cities wiped out and whole countries razed to the ground. Again this was depicted as a war against the evils of dictatorship and in defence of democracy and freedom. The

fact that Britain was united with the dictatorship of Stalin's Russia against the dictatorship of Hitler's Germany was conveniently overlooked. This war like the previous one was fought for economic reasons not ideological ones.

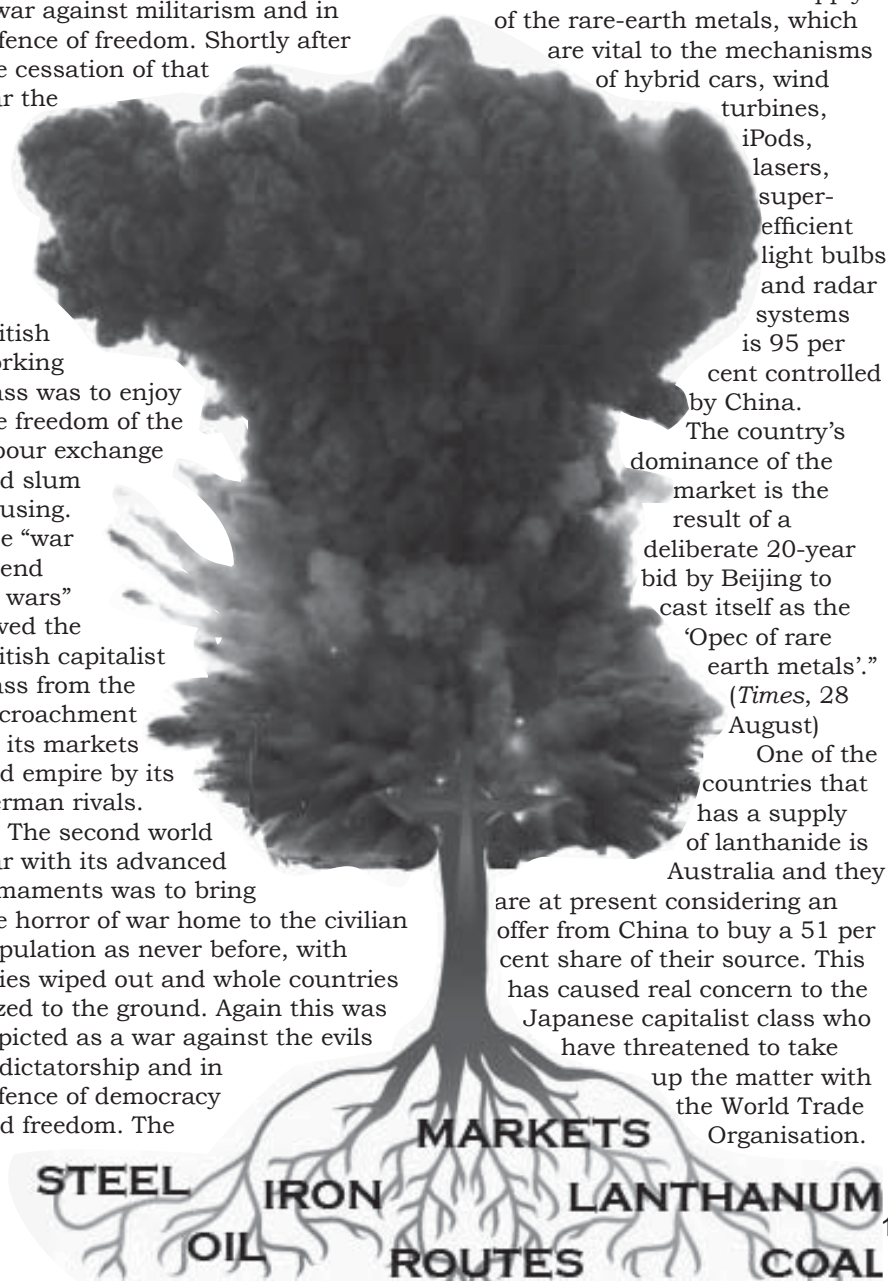
Ever since 1945 the world has experienced local conflicts. Korea, Suez, Vietnam, India/Pakistan – the list is endless. There has not been a day since 1945 when the British army has not been engaged in some sort of conflict, and every one of them has been depicted as something to do with freedom, democracy or some such laudable purpose. The present tensions in the Middle East, however, with its struggles for access to oil so nakedly obvious it has become increasingly difficult for governments to disguise the economic basis of the disputes.

Capitalism is a dynamic system and yesterday's struggle for coal and steel may have been somewhat overshadowed by the conflicts over oil. This in its turn may give way to another source of military dispute – lanthanide metals. "Global supply of the rare-earth metals, which are vital to the mechanisms

of hybrid cars, wind turbines, iPods, lasers, super-efficient light bulbs and radar systems is 95 per cent controlled by China.

The country's dominance of the market is the result of a deliberate 20-year bid by Beijing to cast itself as the 'Opec of rare earth metals'." (*Times*, 28 August)

One of the countries that has a supply of lanthanide is Australia and they are at present considering an offer from China to buy a 51 per cent share of their source. This has caused real concern to the Japanese capitalist class who have threatened to take up the matter with the World Trade Organisation.



“Chinese export quotas of rare earth metals fall below Japan’s demands, forcing even the largest consumers there to rely on smuggled materials to meet about a quarter of their annual needs. A draft of the Chinese plan has been seen by senior executives at several of Japan’s largest trading houses and has sparked fears that

China is aiming to step up dramatically its programme of quota reductions. Beijing has cut exports by about 6 per cent annually over the past decade.” (*Times*, 28 August)

It is impossible to foretell how capitalist rivalries will develop but the growing monopoly of the rare metals market by China is a potential source of economic conflict that could lead to a future military struggle. Capitalism by its very nature breeds competition between nations over such sources of raw materials. This produces threats and counter-threats which leads to ultimatums, trade boycotts and eventually

to military action. The awful truth is that it is members of the working class who own no part of these resources who take part in the resultant conflicts and suffer the resultant tragedies of war.

RD



The SLP of America: a premature obituary?

By some accounts the Socialist Labor Party of America has ceased to function. It has lost its premises and its paper, *The People*, has

not appeared for many months. Some of its locals are still meeting and its ideas live on in its offshoots and breakaways but that’s all.

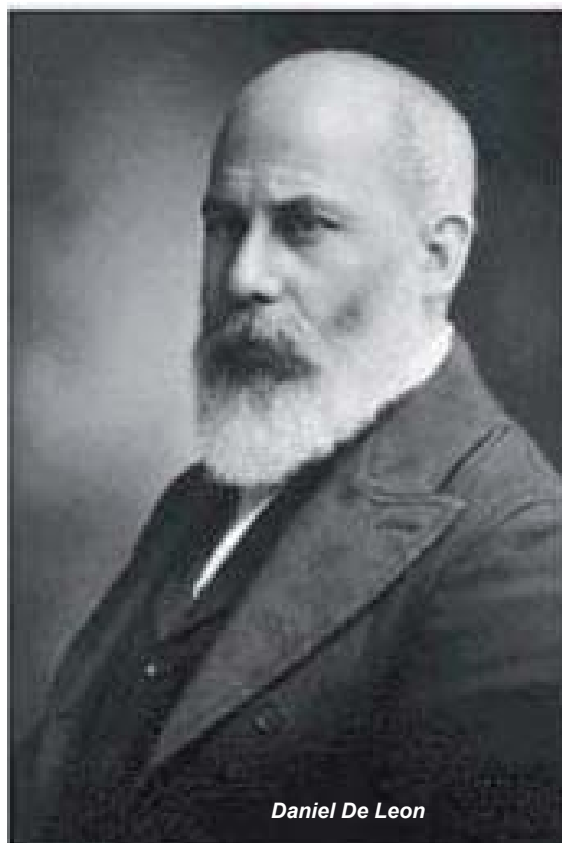
Founded in 1876, for the first twenty or so years it was a reformist organisation – at least, it advocated reforms of capitalism as well as its concept of socialism – not unlike the German Social Democratic Party of which many of its founding and later members had been members before emigrating to America. Things began to change with the entry into its ranks of Daniel De Leon and his election as editor of *The People* in 1892. De Leon campaigned for the SLP to drop its reform programme; which it did in 1900 (which led to a split and the formation of the reformist Socialist Party of America of Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas).

The SLP of America, and its translations by De Leon of Marx’s writings, was one of the inspirations of the ‘impossibilist revolt’ within the Social Democratic Federation in Britain against the opportunism and undemocratic practices

of its leaders, a revolt which led to two breakaways, the first, in 1903, to found the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain, the second, in 1904, to found us, the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

During this period De Leon’s position on the relative importance of political and industrial action changed. At first he insisted that political action – as action aimed at getting control of political power – was paramount, with industrial organisation as supportive, to back up if need be the verdict of the ballot box as well as to take over and run production immediately after the capture of state power. Later, as the agitation built up that eventually led to the foundation of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905 (in which he played a prominent part), he changed the emphasis, arguing that it was organisation on the industrial field – to ‘take and hold’ the means of production – that was the more important, with political action relegated to the role of supporting the take-over of industry by neutralising and disbanding the state.

The SPGB in effect adopted De Leon’s original position while the SLPGB embraced his later ‘socialist industrial unionism’. Even though a casual observer might struggle to detect the subtlety of the difference but would see rather the points of similarity between



Daniel De Leon

the two parties, ideological battle raged over this issue for decades between us and them until the demise of the SLPGB in the 1970s.

In the meantime other, perhaps more important, differences emerged. Like us the SLP of America recognised that socialism was out of the question in Russia in 1917 (though most of the SLP in Britain went over to the Communist Party when it was formed in 1921, providing some of its early leaders). When, however, it was reported that Lenin had made a passing favourable comment on De Leon's 'socialist industrial unionism' blueprint as a way to run industry, the SLP took a more favourable view of Bolshevik Russia. In fact, until the Russian invasion of Finland in 1939, the SLP held that Russia was some sort of 'proletarian regime' even if its politics were wrong (a bit like the Trotskyist position). Even after 1939 it didn't recognise Russia as state capitalist, preferring to call it 'industrial feudalism' or, later, 'bureaucratic collectivism'.

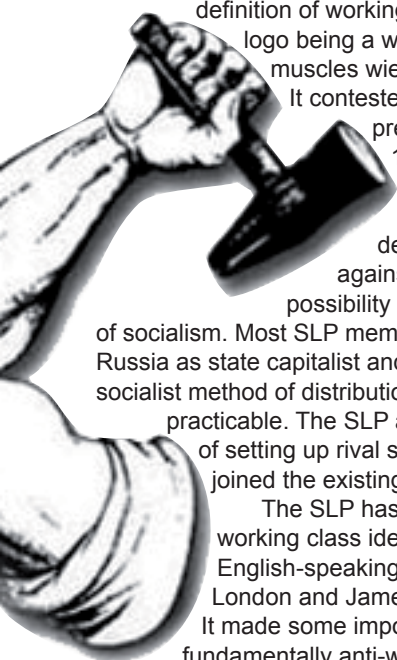
Another difference to emerge was over 'socialism in one country', especially America. De Leon had always tried to project the SLP as in the American revolutionary tradition (partly to dissipate its early German-American character), for instance praising the founding fathers of the US and criticising schoolchildren who refused to salute the American flag. His successors continued this and in its publications reference to a 'socialist America' and a 'socialist Britain' could be found. Even so, the SLP continued to publish material for pre-1914 immigrants in non-English languages (Hungarian, Bulgarian, South Slavonian) until the 1960s.

Then there was the question of 'labour time vouchers'. Marx had mentioned these as one possible way of distributing consumer goods and services in the very early days of socialism had it been established in 1875. De Leon and, after his death in 1914, his successors turned this into a dogma, insisting that these vouchers had to be introduced and maintained for a number of years as *the* method of distribution, despite the fact that the development of the productive forces since 1875 had made it possible to introduce free access more or less immediately after the establishment of socialism. Believe it or not, this is still a burning issue between us and some DeLeonists on internet discussion forums.

There were similarities too. The SLP had the same definition of working class as us (despite its logo being a working man with bulging muscles wielding a huge hammer). It contested elections – every US presidential election between 1892 and 1976 – on a programme offering no reforms of capitalism. It defended Marx's view against the Leninists about the possibility of a peaceful establishment of socialism. Most SLP members eventually came to see Russia as state capitalist and that free access was *the* socialist method of distribution to be reached as soon as practicable. The SLP also abandoned its policy of setting up rival socialist unions and, like us, joined the existing unions for all their faults.

The SLP has its place in the history of working class ideas and organisation in the English-speaking world. 'Names' such as Jack London and James Connolly passed through it. It made some important mistakes, but was not fundamentally anti-working class like Leninism and its offshoots. Unfortunately, they still survive.

ALB



Funny Money

WE HAVE received a letter from Paul Grignon, of Canada, (www.moneyasdebt.net) challenging the analysis in our article "The Myth of Magic Money" in this column last December. He enclosed for review a DVD of his "animated movie series 'Money as Debt' which", he says, "has been viewed by millions worldwide and universally praised as the best explanation of our money system ever produced".

Sorry, but we can't join in the chorus of praise as the DVD incorporates all the myths about money and banks that currency cranks have been propagating for years. It even has a top-hatted banker taking off his hat and using it to produce money out of it just as a magician produces a rabbit.

Apparently, all you need to start a bank is to deposit a sum of money with the central bank and, hey presto, you can start lending out nine times that amount and charge interest on it to boot. Obviously this is nonsense. It's the familiar mistake of assuming that a 10 percent cash-to-other-assets ratio means that, for a given amount of cash deposited with it, a bank can lend out nine times that amount whereas what it means is that it can only lend out nine-tenths of it as it has to keep 10 percent as cash.

Banks are no different from anyone else who lends money – individuals, pawnbrokers or loan sharks – they can only lend what they've got (either because it's theirs or because they've borrowed it themselves). Grignon's confusion is partly the fault of academic economics which teaches that bank loans are a form of money in addition to the money the bank already has (Grignon is right about one thing: money deposited in a bank is a loan to that bank).

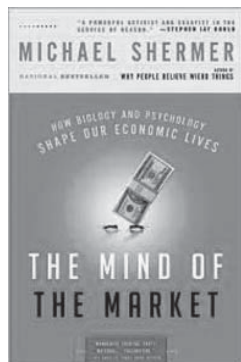
In his letter Grignon quotes from an explanatory booklet *Modern Money Mechanics*, first issued by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago in 1975, which says that from an initial deposit of cash the banking system can go on to eventually make total loans of nine times its amount. Quoting this booklet seems to be obligatory for modern currency cranks, but they could quote just as easily quote from any economics textbook (except that they see US Federal Reserve as their main enemy).

This theory, however, does not say or even imply that the extra loans have been created out of nothing by a mere stroke of the pen or, in Grignon's contemporary version, by "the flash of a few keystrokes". If you follow the theory carefully you will see that each extra bank loan has to be preceded by an extra bank deposit of which only nine-tenth can be re-lent. Grignon accepts this for when the first loan supposedly "created out of nothing" finds its way back to the banking system. The bank receiving this, he says (correctly), can only lend out nine-tenths of it. Logically, he ought to accept this for the first deposit and the first loan too.

His ideal is a capitalism in which banks have become like savings-and-loan institutions in the US (building societies would be the nearest here) and where the state has a monopoly in the creation of interest-free money. What he doesn't realise is that this is the actual situation: banks are glorified savings-and-loan institutions and the only the state bank has the power to create money out of nothing. And cash is interest-free.

Market behaviour

***The Mind of the Market : How Biology and Psychology Shape Our Economic Lives.* By Michael Shermer. Holt Paperback. New York. 2008.**



Some of the chapters in this book are interesting and informative, despite its author being a self-declared follower of the free-market ideologist, Ludwig von Mises and so

an apologist for capitalism and a dedicated opponent of anything that seems to be socialism. Shermer is also a leading American 'skeptic' and a *Scientific American* columnist.

Economics, as now taught, is an odd discipline. It defines itself as the study of the allocation amongst competing ends of resources in short supply. To express this mathematically it has to make the absurd assumption that the ends are infinite, i.e. that people are infinitely greedy. It also assumes that economic actors (corporations, workers, consumers) act entirely rationally. Von Mises in fact regarded economic decision-making as the archetypal form of rational decision-making.

In recent years, some economists, calling themselves 'behavioural economists', have decided to investigate the actual behaviour of consumers, i.e. individual buyers. Not surprisingly they have found that no consumer (not even the writers of economic textbooks) decide what to buy on the basis of some rational calculation about equalising the "marginal utility" of all the things they buy. All sorts of other considerations enter into their decisions as to what to buy (egg what other people are buying, status, etc which the advertising business exploits).

It could be argued that the study of what motivates consumers is outside the scope of economics. Which is the position we Marxists have taken with our criticism of "the final futility of final utility". We have left the study of the satisfaction users might derive from the use-values they acquire to psychology. Shermer goes along with the behavioural economists who have done some useful work in demolishing the myth of the rationally-calculating, narrowly self *homo economicus* that

is one of the basic assumptions of academic economics. He doesn't seem to realise that in doing so he has abandoned one of the key assumptions of the von Mises school of economics. In fact he goes so far as to concede that if people really did behave in this way, then capitalism could never have survived; even capitalism relies on the social nature of humans and their biological and psychological need to trust and co-operate with each other.

Shermer accepts the theories of the "evolutionary psychologists" according to which our reactions and decisions – including in economic matters – are influenced by the fact that our brains evolved when we were hunter-gatherers (as opposed to by purely rational calculations). No doubt our brain did evolve under these circumstances but this does not mean that we are therefore unsuited to live by acquiring what we need to live in any other way. The human brain that evolved is a brain that allows us to adapt to a great variety of ways of acquiring what we need.

We can live just as much under a capitalist system (where Shermer says we are 'consumer-traders') as in a socialist society (where we'd become 'giver-takers'). If, as the evolutionary psychologists claim, that our brains predispose us not to live freeloaders and to get satisfaction out of co-operating, and even helping, our fellow humans, these are features that would fully fit in with socialist society. Shermer thinks that they point to capitalism being the best system for humans to produce and share out wealth.

However, his defence of capitalism is pretty pathetic. On the basis of studies of the behaviour of people who are still hunter-gatherers today involved in face-to-face barter and of the measured effects on the brains of individuals choosing to buy something, he concludes that 'trade' and 'trading' is good for us. This ignores that 'trade' is not the only way of transferring the use of something from one person to another. There is also giving and taking. So, this is not an argument for buying and selling as best suited to our 'biology and psychology'.

But the main flaw in Shermer's argument is that there is an enormous difference between face-to-face barter and shopping and inter-capitalist trade. Inter-capitalist trade is carried on by states and corporations which do act in the ruthlessly calculating way that orthodox economics supposes individuals do. They do aim to maximise monetary profits in

the long or short term. They don't behave as we humans do. In fact some psychologists (as in the film *The Corporation*) have pointed out that if a human behaved in the same way as capitalist firms do – concentrating obsessively on one single aim (in this case, making profits) to the neglect of all other considerations – they would be classified as psychopaths.

Shermer shows up here the flaw in the defence of capitalism put up by ideologists such as von Mises – they assume that present-day capitalism is based entirely on freely-negotiated contract between individuals, as if production and trade were carried on by individual, or at least small-scale producers, and shopkeepers. This might have been the case in Adam Smith's day (mid-18th century) but is not the case today. Today production is carried on in large-scale productive units by producers contracted to work for wages, but not by other individuals but by capitalist firms which, while in contract law have a fictitious 'personality', are not really persons which biological brains. Their behaviour cannot therefore be explained by evolutionary or any other kinds of psychology, but only by a study of the impersonal laws of the market and profit-making which impose themselves on those who make decisions within them irrespective of what these human decision-makers might think or want.

ALB

Made to Waste

***Made to Break. Technology and Obsolescence in America.* By Giles Slade. Harvard University Press. 2006.**



In 1960 the American investigative journalist, Vance Packard, brought out a book *The Waste Makers*. Subtitled "A startling revelation of planned

wastefulness and obsolescence in industry today", it exposed how capitalist firms making consumer goods were deliberately designing them to break down after a calculated period of time so as to encourage repeat sales.

This new book covers the same ground and is a history of

'obsolescence' in America. Slade identifies three kinds: a product can become obsolete because something new, and genuinely better, has been invented (as happened, for instance, to cut throat razors and gas lighting); or because of advertising; or because it had been deliberately built-in to the product (also known as 'death dating').

The manufacturers and their advertisers were quite open about what they were doing. Thus a Justus George in 1928:

"We must induce people . . . to buy a greater variety of goods on the same principle that they now buy automobiles, radios and clothes, namely: buying goods not to wear out, but to trade in or to discard after a short time . . . the progressive obsolescence principle . . . means buying for up-to-dateness, efficiency, buying for . . . the sense of modernness rather than simply for the last ounce of use" (quoted p. 58).

And a Brooks Stevens in 1958:

"Our whole economy is based on planned obsolescence and everybody who can read without moving his lips should know it by now. We make good products, we induce people to buy them, and then next year we deliberately introduce something that will make those products old fashioned, out of date, obsolete. We do that for the soundest reason: to make money" (quoted p. 153).

This provoked a conflict with engineers, who knew they could make solid products that could last for years, but in the end their reluctance was overcome (they, too, are in the end only hired employees who have to do their employer's bidding). It is also enormously wasteful as still useable products, and the material resources that went into making them, are simply thrown away.

Things have got worse since Packard's day, with the use of soldered circuits in electronic devices that are now part of everyday life. These are easy and cheap to produce but their chipboards can't be repaired. According to Slade, there is a growing problem of where to dispose of abandoned (but still useable) cell phones (as mobile phones are called in America) which, together with other 'e-waste', contain materials that are harmful to the environment.

Like Packard Slade blames consumers, if not so much as manufacturers. If, he argues, people take account of the effect on the environment of what they buy manufacturers will begin "to adopt design strategies that include not just planned obsolescence but planned

disassembly and reuse as part of the product life cycle". This assumes that the capitalist economy is driven by consumers. It isn't. It's driven by the drive of capitalist firms to make as much profit as they can.

ALB

Choosing an occupation

Reports & Reflections on the 2009 UK Ford-Visteon Dispute: a Post-Fordist Struggle. Past Tense, June 2009. www.past-tense.org.uk

"On 31st of March 2009 Ford/Visteon announced the closure of three factories in the UK and the sacking of 610 workers... No guarantees were given concerning redundancy or pensions payments. The management had made the workers work up to the last minute, knowing that they would not even receive any wages for their final shifts." In response, workers from the Belfast plant spontaneously occupied the sites and in a few hours were joined by several hundred local supporters. On hearing the news, workers from the Basildon and Enfield plants went into occupation the following day. This pamphlet concentrates mainly on the Enfield occupation, which lasted for 9 days, and is written by a supporter of the workers.

Of particular interest is the author's analysis of the role of the union during the occupation, particularly their role "as mediators and defenders of capitalist exploitation". It is true that the unions role is one of mediation and as such does nothing to challenge the material basis of the relation between workers and employers, however as the existence of the wages system is only questioned by a tiny minority this can be of no great surprise, the unions do not work to establish socialism because their members are not socialists. To write of unions as defenders of capitalist exploitation is a step too far, as the author of the pamphlet accepts, "to be without a union would usually be even worse under present conditions."

The real question is one of internal democracy and the extent in which the union is run by and for its membership. Whilst all unions do have a certain amount of democratic framework the amount of member participation is often lacking, perhaps not surprising when "unions are generally run today primarily as

financial service brokers – "negotiating deals on insurance, mortgages and pensions, medical cover, holidays and car breakdown services" etc – and investment funds with a sideline in industrial arbitration." Unions, sometimes under the well entrenched leadership of full time officials, have at times acted against the interests of the working class but such occurrences should not be understood as a fault of the union form per se but as an expression of the contradictions of the position of workers under capitalism.

The assumption – which is not explicitly stated in the pamphlet but hinted at in certain passages – that capitalism can be overcome through industrial action alone and that this occupation was part of such a process, is not one that should go unquestioned. Workers who struggle to maintain and better their conditions should be commended, but until the working class consciously and politically organise to end the wages system the same battles will have to be fought over and over again. It is true that the bitter experience of the Visteon workers may lead some of them to question the basis of capitalist society, but from start to finish all this struggle was attempting was to get the best from a bad situation, not to bring about world socialism.

A myriad of experiences from everyday life can provide enough motivation for the disenchanted to ask themselves 'why do I have to do this everyday?' To steal a pithy phrase from the Socialist Party of Australia "it is Capitalism itself, unable to solve crisis, unemployment and poverty, engaging in horrifying wars, which digs its own grave. Workers are learning by bitter experience and bloody sacrifice for interests not their own. They are learning very slowly. Our job is to shorten the time, to speed up the process"

The workers at Visteon secured a deal ten times greater than the original offer, their (and our) position as materially dependent sellers of labour-power continues.

DJP

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Winter Film Programme

Sundays at 6pm at 52 Clapham High St.

- 1 November -- **The Fog of War** (life & times of Robert McNamara - 95 mins)
- 15 November -- **Matewan** (mining dispute in 1920's Virginia - 142 mins)
- 29 November -- **Sicko** (American healthcare under scrutiny- 120 mins)
- 13 December -- **Earthlings** (Animals and economic interests - 95 mins)
- 17 January -- **Manufacturing Consent** (part one) (Noam Chomsky & the Media)
- 31 January -- **Manufacturing Consent** (part two)
- 14 February -- **Why we Fight** (U.S. Army training film - 98 mins)
- 28 February -- **Comrades** (part one) (film about the Tolpuddle Martyrs)
- 14th March -- **Comrades** (part two)

Saturday 31 October 11am to 7pm

BOOK SALE

Sale of novels as well as books on history, politics and economics.

52 Clapham High St, SW4

London

Tuesday 13 October 7.30 pm

NATIONALISM AND DANGEROUS NONSENSE

Speakers: Gwynn Thomas & Danny Lambert.

52 Clapham High St, SW4

Autumn Delegate Meeting

Saturday 17 October 10.30am to 5.30pm

Sunday 18 October 11.00am to 5.00pm

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4.

Glasgow

Wednesday 21 October, 8.30pm

THE ZEITGEIST MOVEMENT

Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road.

OBITUARY

Vincent Littlemore

West London branch are saddened to have to report the death of Vincent Littlemore two days before his 80th birthday. He first came across the party at outdoor meetings in Manchester, where he originally came from, joining as a teenager and becoming an outdoor speaker at Platts Fields and Alexandra Park. Later he moved to London where he studied to become a quantity surveyor. While pursuing his profession, getting married and raising a family, his membership lapsed but he remained a steadfast socialist arguing the case for socialism as the occasions arose. On his retirement in 1994 he formally rejoined and became a regular attendee at branch meetings in Chiswick until he suffered a stroke in 2002. After that he kept in regular touch by telephone to discuss books about the state of the capitalist economy and how best to publicise the socialist case. The Party was represented at his non-religious funeral in Leatherhead. Our condolences go to his daughter Sue, the BBC journalist, and to her partner John Denham.

The Use of the Vote



The power you have

In the weeks of electoral excitement before polling day you will have been made to appreciate, at least a little, that you are, for the moment, important people. Between elections you look up to politicians and big business men as important, but during elections it is they who go to endless trouble to influence you and win your support for them and their policies. It is you who can make or mar the career of a politician and you who can place power in the hands of a government which during its term of office can, by taxation and tariff policies or by subsidies, raise some industries to prosperity and bring others to their ruin. It is you who give power to governments in whose hands rest decisions about peace and war.

Power for no use

Since the Socialist Party of Great Britain was formed there have been fourteen general elections in this country: this is the fifteenth.

Fifteen times the Tory, Liberal and Labour Parties have appealed to you to help them with your votes. Fourteen times you, the workers, have used your votes against your own interests.

Although the parties we have mentioned use different names for their programmes and promises of legislation, there is very little of importance dividing them. They are all concerned with trying to administer British capitalism as well as may be in a troubled world of rival capitalist groups. In any big emergency like the crisis of 1931 or in war they come together and form coalition governments

Whichever of them, you, the workers, vote for in an election, it is a defeat for you. a betrayal of your own interests.

(from Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, October 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1.That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2.That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3.That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4.That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6.That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7.That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8.The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



The Hard Life and Times of Alan Duncan



At this distance the coming general election promises – or should that be threatens – to become a contest between Gordon Brown and David Cameron over who can be trusted to be the more ruthless and speedy as a slasher and sacker. After his expeditious dealing with the crazier expense claims of the more arrogant Tory MPs, Cameron could be seen as a nose ahead – which may explain the manner in which he firmly bumped Alan Duncan down the greasy pole, from Shadow Leader of the House to Shadow Justice Minister. It was all to do with Duncan allowing himself to be recorded, by a man named Heydon Prowse, moaning about the mistreatment and malnourishment of MPs: “No one who has done anything on the outside world, or is capable of doing such a thing, will ever come into this place again, the way we are going. Basically it’s being nationalised. You have to live on rations and are treated like shit”. This raises the question of why there are always so many candidates, in every constituency, fighting each other for a life of rations and abuse – but never mind. Cameron at first tried to draw a veil over the problem by saying that he had “made it clear in no uncertain terms that when it comes to the mess of expenses, the words we use, just as the actions we take, have got to demonstrate completely that we share the public’s real fury at what went on in Parliament. Alan made a bad mistake and he has acknowledged that...I think we should leave it at that”. But then Cameron returned from holiday in a slightly different mood, demoting Duncan rather than condemning him to the impoverishment of the back benches. This may have had something to do with Duncan’s erratic background and standing as a Tory MP.

Obscurity

Elected in John Major’s surprise 1992 election win for the rock-solid Conservative seat of Rutland and Melton – a nice reward for the offer of his home in Westminster as headquarters for Major’s leadership campaign after Thatcher’s resignation in 1990 – Duncan spent some time in relative obscurity as a faultlessly handsome, immaculate and fixedly smiling participant in group photographs until in December 1993 he blossomed as Parliamentary Private Secretary at the then Ministry of Health. However any celebration of this promising start was cruelly cut off just a month later after the embarrassing news that he had lent an elderly neighbour the money to buy his council house at a cut price under the right-to-buy scheme so beloved of Thatcher’s Tories. But three years later Duncan, who described himself as a libertarian member of the Thatcherite Conservative Way Forward, cashed in on the deal by buying the house from the neighbour – again at a very attractive price. His unavoidable resignation was greeted, with typical asperity, by Giles Brandreth: “little Duncan has fallen on his sword...swiftly and with good grace”. Which characteristic probably also featured in another episode when, as the owner of Harcourt Consultants – advising companies, governments and whoever can afford to pay on matters concerning oil and gas supplies – he made over £1 million through involvement in supplying oil to Pakistan after disruption of the flow from Kuwait in the Gulf War. It might be thought that this said more about the reasons for the British involvement in that war than all the inflated nonsense about rooting out terrorists.

And “good grace” again last year, when it emerged that while he was Shadow Business Secretary, responsible for Tory policy on energy, Duncan’s private office received donations from the chairman of Vitol – one of the world’s top crude oil traders.

Taliban

To put it moderately Duncan enjoys – and expends a lot of energy in – being the centre of attention. However much this may please him it has also cultivated a significant number of rivals and enemies. After the 2005 general election he declared himself to be a candidate for the Tory leadership in place of the defeated Michael Howard but had to withdraw rapidly after it was clear that there was no support for him – which he put down to the “Tory Taliban”. So it was to be expected, when the MP’s expenses scam was dragged into the open Duncan’s claims would be closely scrutinised – especially in view of the fact that, as Shadow Leader of the House, he oversaw the party’s reform policy on the matter. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that he had claimed £1400 a month mortgage interest on his Rutland home, recouped over £4000 for gardening expenses during a three year period and claimed £598 for maintenance of a ride-on lawn mower with £41 to repair a puncture in the machine. Some residents in his constituency saw this as nauseating enough to justify inviting passers-by to take a ride on a lawn mower which they had set up in the street – and Heydon Prowse to cut a £ sign in Duncan’s lawn. Last May *Have I Got News For You* pursued Duncan by showing a passage from a previous appearance when he boasted about his Second Home Allowance (he also owns two properties in Westminster) and described it as “a great system” – until Cameron went after him, when he agreed to refund the money and called for “the system” to be changed. According to the website *ConservativeHome* – notable for its combative style – a poll of 1600 grassroots Tories in Duncan’s constituency thought he should be sacked.

Comfort

Members of Parliament come in many shapes, sizes and origins. Duncan’s replacement as Shadow Leader of the House is Sir George Young, an Old Etonian who once complained of having to declare, as an MP, a gift of bottles of champagne and who revealed the depth of his understanding of the meaning of poverty when he described the homeless as “people you step over when you leave the opera”. Young was chairman of the House of Commons Committee on Standards and Privileges when, in 2003, it gave judgement in the matter of the false expense claims by the Tory MP for Windsor, Michael Trend, amounting to over £90,000. Trend, apologising to the Commons, put it all down to his being “muddled and naive”. Young’s committee were not unsympathetic and just suspended Trend for two weeks. A memory to comfort Alan Duncan in the darkest days of his struggles to survive on his rations.

IVAN



Voice from the Back

Capitalism's Priorities

As various pieces of legislation pass through the US governmental machine it is often observed that the process is tortuously slow. An example of this tardy procedure has recently been revealed in the proposed Health Bill. No such delay is evidenced when it comes to military budgets. "With hardly any debate, a powerful Senate committee Thursday approved President Barack Obama's \$128 billion request for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for the budget year beginning in October. The move came as anxiety is increasing on Capitol Hill over the chances for success in Afghanistan and as Obama weighs whether to send more forces to the country. The war funding was approved as the Appropriations Committee voted unanimously for a \$636 billion spending measure funding next year's Pentagon budget." (*Huffington Post*, 10 September) The health of the American working class is obviously of less importance than the military needs of the owning class.

Poisoned By Capitalism

Capitalism is a poisonous society. Thousands of coal miners have suffered lung diseases, thousands more in shipyards and factories have been maimed by asbestos. In the mad scramble for more and more profits the owning class have endangered the health and even the life of the working class. From China comes this latest example of the profit system's murderous nature. "More than 2,000 children have been found to have lead poisoning because Chinese factories greedy for profit have spewed out pollutants without carrying out even the most minor environmental monitoring. Officials announced yesterday that 1,354 children under 14, who had been living and going to school for more than two



years within a few hundred metres of a manganese smelter, had excess lead in their blood. Local officials said that the numbers could rise when further tests were carried out." (*Times*, 21 August)

Champagne Socialists

In the past when Southern Californian fruit growers were faced with a glut and falling prices they let the fruit rot on the trees. When castigated for this apparent madness they pointed out the quite logical capitalist argument that they would have to pay pickers wages for fruit they couldn't sell. When again they were taken to task for this argument they were offered by some charitable organisations the prospect of them supplying free labour and they would distribute to the needy. Again the fruit growers had an answer to that. "Every year charitable organisations buy at cut-rate prices our unsold surplus. Giving it away would even spoil that source of income for us." The fruitgrowers may have appeared heartless but from an economic standpoint letting the fruit rot seemed the logical action. A similar solution is being followed today by French wine producers. "Hopes of a glut of cheap champagne are set to be dashed when vineyards meet next week to agree on a big cut in production to prop up prices. With sales falling, producers may be ordered to

leave up to half their grapes to wither on the vine in an attempt to squeeze the market." (*Times*, 29 August) Capitalism is a crazy system, obviously inside socialism we would deal with the problem by drinking more champagne.

A Modest Sort

Away back in the bad old days we had ruthless dictators with over-bearing ideas of their own importance but today's leaders are much more modest fellows.

In the past we had people like the despot Stalin who regularly polled over 100 percent at "elections", nowadays in "democratic" Belarus we have more self-effacing creatures at the helm of state. "The Belarusian strongman, Alexander Lukashenko, admitted that he rigged the 2006 election because, he said, his popularity was so vast that the true margin of victory was unbelievable and had to be cut from 93 to 80 per cent." (*Times*, 28 August)

Belarusian Democracy



Free Lunch



by Rigg



socialist standard



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Free at last...

Twenty years beyond the Berlin Wall



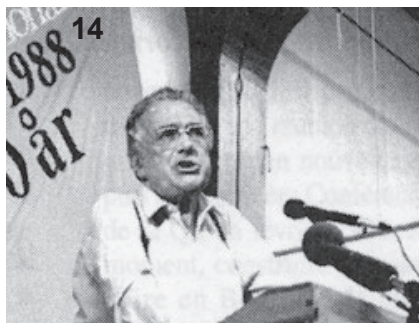
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 7 November** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
tel: 020 7622 3811
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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Socialism was never tried

TWENTY YEARS ago this month the Berlin Wall came down, symbolising the end of the division of Europe into Western and Russian spheres of influence. Russia had lost the Cold War and its rulers under Gorbachev had decided they would no longer prop up the puppet regimes Russia had set up in Eastern Europe in accordance with the carve-up that Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin had agreed when they had met in Yalta in February 1945.

From this point of view, it symbolised a shift in imperialist power politics. Worse was to come for Russia when, two years later, the so-called "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" broke up into its constituent republics, reducing the size of Russia to the smallest it had been for centuries.

There was some benefit for the people of the countries concerned. The limited political democracy which had existed in Western Europe was extended to them, allowing workers to organise in trade unions that were not part of the state machine as they had been and people to get together to express and disseminate differing political views, including socialist ones. The ending of the one-party dictatorships there was clearly a welcome development.

We had hoped for more. After all, we had long denounced the claim that these countries were "the socialist countries" in which the working class ruled, and we had been proved right. With them out of the way it should have been easier to propagate socialist ideas. Unfortunately, the opposite conclusion prevailed: that they had in fact been socialist countries

and that their collapse represented the failure of socialism.

Socialism, it was said, had been tried and failed and was now out-dated and irrelevant. Pro-capitalist intellectuals such as Francis Fukuyama even triumphantly proclaimed the "end of history" – that human evolution had come to a peaceful and harmonious end with the universal establishment of a market economy and governments deriving their legitimacy from elections.

A hard time followed for socialists and for anyone calling themselves socialist. In fact many of these dropped the pretence and argued that now the only choice was between different "models" of capitalism. We denied this and asserted that socialism was still relevant. What had failed in Russia and Eastern Europe was not socialism, but a form of capitalism where it was the state that had presided over the exploitation of the wage-working class and the accumulation of capital out of profits. It was this state-capitalist system that had failed, not socialism.

The fall of the Wall did not bring peace and harmony. Capitalism has continued to produce wars and economic crises, compounded by the threat of global warming. The general deprivation and alienation it creates has continued. The common ownership and democratic control of productive forces, with production directly for use and distribution on the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need", remains the only framework within which can be solved the problems facing the working class in particular and humanity in general.



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Gullibility Travels

ONE has to feel a bit sorry for Graham Mace who, keen to improve his car's green performance, bought an online 'hydrofuel conversion kit' in the hope that it would save 30 per cent on fuel consumption, only to find that it ran on snake oil instead ('Fuel boost device 'does not work', *BBC Online*, 19 Oct). After chucking £700 at this miracle device he hadn't saved so much as a dribble of fuel, at which point a BBC investigation revealed the awful truth. It was a con.

But one wonders at the thinking here. Didn't it occur to him to wonder why none of his friends knew about this ingenious gadget, why garages or motor suppliers didn't stock it, or why it wasn't fitted as standard at the factory? And what possessed him, after shelling out the original £290 with no success, to spend a further £400 on 'upgrades' rather than cut his losses? Even if it had worked, he'd have had to drive to Vladivostok and back to make up for the outlay. What on earth was going on?

Consumer programmes regularly trot out the old standard: if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. But throw in a bit of seductive science and the consumer just seems to melt like warm butter, effectively separated from their money and common sense in equal measure. *New Scientist* notes that dodgy online companies think they can sell anything if they put the word 'quantum' in their blurb, like the 'quantum pulse device' that powers a 'human generator' and retails for a mere €420,000 (17 October). Hard to believe that anyone is dumb enough to fall for this supposed immortality machine, but you would only need one or two gullible net-travellers and you'd be made for life, so such stuff is always worth a punt to the scruple-free. If people can't summon the wit to do a bit of comparative research, one feels that they deserve everything they get (or rather, don't get) for their money.

Daft pseudo-scientific ideas have been around a long time though. Who hasn't been assured with huge confidence by someone wearing a copper bracelet that it helps them enormously with their arthritis? But in the first properly controlled trial, at York University, these often expensive jewellery accessories fared no better than placebos ('Bracelets 'useless' in arthritis', *BBC Online*, 16 October). What undoubtedly explains the popularity, and durability, of such urban myths is the effect of 'authority', whether it comes from one's peers, one's elders or

one's newspaper, even though not one of these can be trusted as far as you can throw a grandad or a printing press.

As the *Observer* reminds us in relation to current fears concerning the rise of racism (18 October), we are horribly suggestible. We know, for instance, that we would rather give wrong answers than right ones if it means fitting in better (Asch conformity experiment, 1951), that the 'only following orders' defence at Nuremberg is more than a mere excuse (the Milgram pain-inflicting experiment, 1961, and the Stanford prison experiment, 1971), and that it's a whole lot easier to start a Nazi party among liberal students than anyone would believe possible (Ron Jones and the 'Third Wave' experiment, 1967).

It's not our fault. We're a social species, with an outside brain as mad as it is miraculous, and science is about as natural to us as an abacus to a baboon. Gullibility is only another word for 'faith' or 'conviction', part of the social glue that binds us. It travels by express while reason has to plod on foot. But that's all the more reason to make an effort with our reasoning capacity, both in buying products and buying into ideas.

Improbability drivers

WHO would believe - a vegetarian spider and a stingless wasp? Both of these turned out to be true, in a 'truth is stranger than April fool' kind of way, as was the story about the Maldives politicians who held a cabinet meeting under water. While this excellent innovation should be made compulsory for all politicians (minus scuba gear) we look forward to a story about a 'benevolent species of capitalist' discovered lurking somewhere north of Basingstoke and miraculously still in business.

Wackier still is the theory put forward by two CERN physicists, that the Large Hadron Collider is being sabotaged by ripples in time returning from some future cataclysm where, oh cripes, they really do find the Higgs boson and nature revolts ('The Collider, the Particle and a Theory About Fate', *New York Times*, 12 October). That's the thing about quantum theory. It's so improbable anyway that theoretical physicists, like celebs, can talk any bollocks they like and still get serious media attention. Maybe we should start talking about 'quantum socialism' and thereby grab a few headlines.

Time to call time

AFTER the runaway success of Europe-wide anti-smoking legislation, much is now being made about 'passive drinking' as states gear up for a similar assault on that other popular working-class pastime.

Despite efforts by the UK government chief adviser on health, Liam Donaldson, to incite a wholesome evangelism among the public by tarring all drinkers as potential wife-beaters or lager louts, the concept of 'passive drinking' is just not going to hold its whiskey and water.

Anyone who's ever been in a pub knows perfectly well that wild-west saloon brawls do not break out as a rule nor do most customers get arrested or fall off buildings pretending to be superheroes.

The fact that more than half the UK's population ignore the government safety limits on alcohol (*Observer*, 18 October)

may be because a), the limits are too low to be of any practical value and b), the government has banned every other drug for spurious reasons so nobody believes anything they say. The half who stay below the limits are probably lying about it anyway.

It's not that there isn't a problem, of course there is. But the bigger problem is a patronising establishment which, not content with screwing workers into the ground, then presumes to lecture us about what's good for us using dubious arguments they fully intend to ignore themselves. For let's not be in any doubt, this is not about anti-drinking among the ruling classes. Let them swill their port and champers and snort their coke until they're cross-eyed and drooling over the chambermaids. This is about controlling the workforce, saving some police and hospital A&E expenses, and cutting absenteeism in the dark satanic wage-mills.

Maybe alcohol is the fifth biggest cause of premature death and disability worldwide (*New Scientist*, 14 October), but workers know damn well that capitalism is responsible for the other four, and that's what drives them to drink in the first place. Capitalists think they can save money by forcing puritanical self-denial on workers, but with the stress of exploitation we face, we don't need temperance, we need to lose our tempers.



Getting from here

Dear Editors

There are good reasons to welcome Rod Shaw's thoughts on the change-over to socialism ('The penny drops', August). One is that attempts so far by socialists to foresee "how the change came" have been far from brilliant. William Morris's scenario of a Trafalgar Square massacre leading to a popular uprising, etc in *News From Nowhere* may have been believable when he wrote it in 1890 but is today utterly incredible. The Party's pamphlet *Socialism as a practical alternative* predicts millions of socialists preparing "programmes of action for immediate implementation once the movement has gained control of the powers and machinery of governments."

A second reason for seriously

considering Rod's piece—even if we don't agree with all of it—is that it is imaginative and inspiring. It combats the negativity of those who claim that socialism is idealistic and against human nature, those who say "It's a nice idea but..."

Rod doesn't underestimate the importance of "taking control of the state machinery from those in power". But he recognises that socialism, like capitalism, is a whole and complete system: "Well before any official declaration was made, people had started to do what was needed to begin creating the new world."

When today we join the Socialist Party we join the world socialist movement; we withdraw support for capitalism even though we have to live in it for the time being; we take the first few faltering steps towards building the socialist future. A few

hundred of us make no impression on the dominance of capitalism; a few thousand of us will begin to make an impression. As our numbers grow we will infiltrate and revolutionise the media, the educational bodies, the workplaces, the arts, cultural, scientific, leisure and other worlds.

The hard part is to get from here to the beginning of there...

In "As Things Are Now" (September) Rod foresees what socialism will be like in just a few ways. We can all find some of what he says likely and acceptable and some unlikely and doubtful. The main thing is that as more of us give up supporting capitalism and start building a socialist world we shall put some flesh on the bones of common ownership, democratic control, production for use and free access.

STAN PARKER, London SW9

Billion dollar bribery

THE NEWS that the Serious Fraud Office have asked the Attorney-General to prosecute BAE on corruption charges has raised a hornets' nest of speculation in the British press about ethics, bribery and business practices. BAE is accused of paying millions of pounds in bribes to win contracts for aircraft in South Africa and the Czech Republic and the sale of air traffic control equipment in Tanzania.

In the past the SFO have investigated allegations of bribery by BAE in Saudi Arabia to win the £43 billion al-Yamamah deal. This was eventually dropped when Prime Minister Tony Blair intervened to retain the fighter contract on the grounds that thousands of British jobs were threatened. He never mentioned the real reason for turning a blind eye, Christian gentleman that he is - the immense profits that were in jeopardy!

So how come the SFO are prepared to proceed with the prosecution of BAE in this case? It would seem that BAE and the SFO were in negotiations about an out-of-court settlement that would have seen BAE pay an enormous great fine of millions without admitting any guilt, but these behind-the-scenes negotiations have broken down probably over the size of the fine or the extent of admitted culpability. We will probably never know the full extent of the skulduggery and chicanery that is going on in this behind-the-doors trickery, but it has been reported that the SFO was looking for up to a £1 billion fine and the BAE was only offering in the region of tens of millions.

The reaction of the British press has been interesting. Some of them have suggested that bribery is the accepted

modus operandi with some foreign governments and that Britain should not tie its hands behind its back when dealing with rivals for these lucrative contracts. Others have claimed that if guilt is admitted this may harm BAE in future negotiations for contracts with the USA - their single biggest customer.

The journalist Antonia Senior in her support for BAE is particularly frank in her analysis of the past practices of British commerce. "We may be incorruptible at home, but when dealing with Johnny Foreigner all bets are off. The moral transgressor is the receiver of bribes, not the payer. It's Johnny's fault, of course; we can't expect the same standards from a foreigner. This jingoistic hypocrisy has long been a feature of British adventures abroad, whether they are in the military or economic line. We lied, bribed and slaughtered our way to an empire that we subsequently imbued with Christian piety. The pursuit of profit at the expense of morality has been the basis of our foreign policy for as long as we called ourselves British." (*Times*, 2 October)

The BAE bribery case is by no means unique. At the end of September the SFO successfully pursued Mabey & Johnson, the bridge builders for a bribery deal in Iraq and obtained a £6.6 million fine. Indeed this success may have emboldened the SFO to turn the screws on BAE. Whether BAE is eventually prosecuted or some old pals act wins the day it is impossible to tell, but this latest episode is just another example of the duplicity, fraud and criminality that lies at the heart of world capitalism.

RD

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Malawi:

Children Of The Tobacco Fields

WE ALL know that tobacco harms those who smoke it. Few are aware of the damage it does to those who pick and process it.

The “children’s organisation” Plan International recently issued a report about children in Malawi, some as young as five, who toil up to twelve hours in the tobacco fields for an average daily wage of 11 p. (*Hard Work, Long Hours and Little Pay*)

The finding that has attracted most attention is that these children are being poisoned by the nicotine “juice” they absorb through the skin – and also ingest, as they have no chance to wash hands before eating. Many of the ailments that plague them – headaches, abdominal and chest pain, nausea, breathlessness, dizziness – are symptoms of Green Tobacco Sickness.

But much of their suffering has nothing to do with nicotine. All have blisters on their hands. All have pains – in the shoulders, neck, back, knees – caused by overexertion of their immature muscles. About a third of the children are coughing blood, which suggests TB.

Many of the children examined had been beaten, kicked or otherwise physically abused by estate owners or supervisors. Many of the girls had been raped by them. One boy had deep knee wounds as a result of being made to walk across a stony field on his knees as punishment for “laziness”.

Who owns the estates?

Who are these estate owners?

Commercial tobacco farming in Malawi began late in the 19th century, when it was the British colony of Nyasaland. White settlers seized much of the best arable land for plantations of tea, coffee, tung trees (for their oil, used as a wood finisher) and – mostly -- tobacco. Even today the majority of owners of large estates are descendants of the colonial settlers, although now there are also black owners.

In 1948 some tung and tobacco plantations (estates) were taken over by the Colonial Development Corporation, funded mainly by the British Treasury. After Malawi gained formal independence in 1964, these came under state ownership. Later they were reprivatized. Another recent change is the direct acquisition of some estates by international tobacco companies.

The estates were established on land stolen from traditional peasant communities. The process began in colonial times but continued even after independence, under the Banda regime. Land theft impoverishes local communities and compels those worst affected to offer themselves – or their children! – to the estate owners as wage slaves.

Tobacco is also grown on many small family farms. Here too, children work and suck in nicotine juice, alongside their parents.

The tobacco cartel

Malawi’s tobacco market is dominated – through subsidiaries – by two international corporations, Universal Corporation and Alliance One International. These corporations operate a cartel, refusing to compete and colluding

to keep tobacco purchase prices low. This in turn intensifies the pressure on farm owners to minimise costs by exploiting cheap or free child labour – a practice that the corporations hypocritically claim to oppose.

Representatives of the corporations sit on several committees that advise the government of Malawi on economic policy. By this means they ensure that their interests are served and block any initiatives to diversify the economy and reduce the country’s dependence on tobacco.

The main reason why child labour is so prevalent in Malawian agriculture is the poverty – in particular, land hunger – of most of the rural population. This reflects not any absolute shortage of land but rather the highly skewed pattern of land ownership. Large tracts of land lie fallow on the big estates.

A pathetic contrast

How does Plan International propose to help the children on the tobacco farms?

Well, it will “educate farm owners and supervisors” and persuade them to provide the children with protective clothing. Taking the tobacco companies’ PR at face value, it will urge them to “scrutinise their suppliers more closely”. It will not, however, support a ban on children picking tobacco because that is “unrealistic” – as indeed it is if you refuse to challenge underlying social conditions.

But what a pathetic contrast such “realism” makes with Plan International’s “vision” of “a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies that respect people’s rights and dignity”!

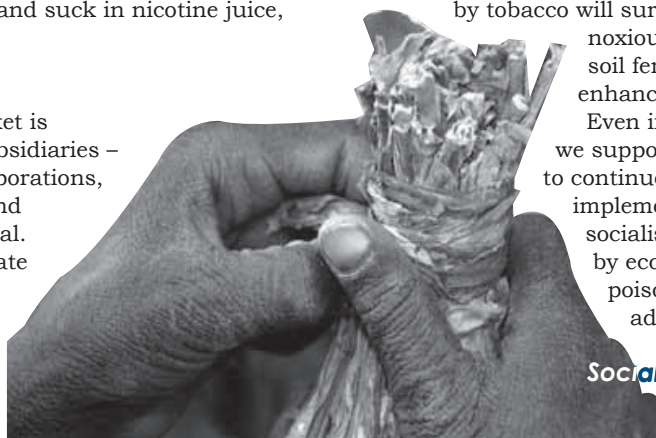
Environmental degradation

Besides ruining people’s health, tobacco degrades the environment. The tobacco monoculture that dominates much of Malawi depletes the soil of nutrients. It also causes extensive deforestation, as trees are felled to provide firewood for curing the tobacco leaves, and this in turn further erodes the soil. Water sources are contaminated. After over a century of tobacco cultivation, all these processes are already far advanced. (For fuller analysis, see the chapter by Geist, Otanez and Kapito in Andrew Millington and Wendy Jepson, eds. *Land Change Science in the Tropics: Changing Agricultural Landscapes*, Springer 2008.)

Tobacco in socialist society?

Will tobacco be grown in socialist society? On a small scale, possibly, by addicts for their own use. But it’s hard to imagine socialist society making planned provision, within the framework of democratic decision-making, for tobacco production. People aware of all the harm caused by tobacco will surely prefer to halt cultivation of this noxious weed. They will seek to restore soil fertility, reverse deforestation and enhance local food supply.

Even if, for the sake of argument, we suppose that the decision is made to continue producing tobacco, will it be implemented? Will the free people of socialist society, no longer spurred on by economic necessity, voluntarily poison themselves just to feed others’ addictions?



IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



HMM. LOVE THESE SMALL ADS...
'LOANS £50-£1000' YOUR KNEECAPS AS COLLATERAL, THEY MIGHT ADD.



BUT ARN'T BANKS JUST GLORIFIED LOAN SHARKS, REALLY? ON A BIGGER SCALE. WITH A SHEEN OF RESPECTABILITY. WITH HUGE BAILOUTS FROM GOVERNMENT. BUT OTHERWISE MUCH THE SAME THING...



AUSTAIR DARLING THROWS AWAY MORE OF OUR MONEY, REPEATING THE MANTRA 'WE'VE GOT TO GET THE BANKS LENDING AGAIN' BUT ISN'T THAT HOW WE GOT INTO THIS MESS IN THE FIRST PLACE?



... AND THAT CONFIDENCE HAS EVAPORATED BIG TIME, LATELY! CAN GOVERNMENT PUT IT BACK? MAYBE YOU CAN'T FORCE AN IDEA LIKE CONFIDENCE. IT'S EITHER THERE OR IT AINT.

HIGH ST BANK

NO JOB?
NO MONEY?
NEED A LOAN?
DONT EVEN ASK...



BANKING IS LARGELY BASED ON CONFIDENCE. SAY SOMEONE OWES YOU £100. THAT FIGURE IS REAL IN YOUR HEAD, AS LONG AS YOU BELIEVE THIS PERSON CAN OR WILL PAY YOU BACK. ONCE YOU START TO DOUBT THIS, THE £100 YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD JUST MAGICALLY EVAPORATES...



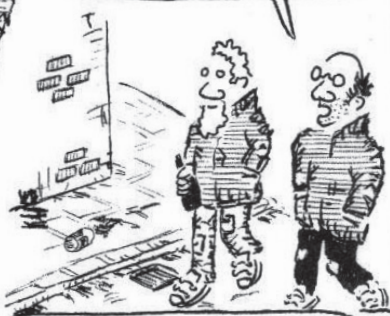
GREGORY 09

OF COURSE, THE WHOLE CRISLY APPARATUS OF CAPITALISM RESTS ON THIS NEBULOUS CONCEPT OF CONFIDENCE... THE STOCK MARKET WILL KEEP GOING UP! SO WILL HOUSE PRICES. AND PEOPLE WILL KEEP BUYING. WHAT A WAY TO RUN A SOCIETY. PRETTY CRAZY, LOOKING AT IT OBJECTIVELY...

BUY NOW!
PAY NOTHING FOR 6 MONTHS!
(AND THEN GET CLOBBERED)



BUT PEOPLE WILL SAY 'THAT'S JUST THE WAY THE WORLD IS'... MAYBE. OK. I'LL TAKE THEM AT THEIR WORD...

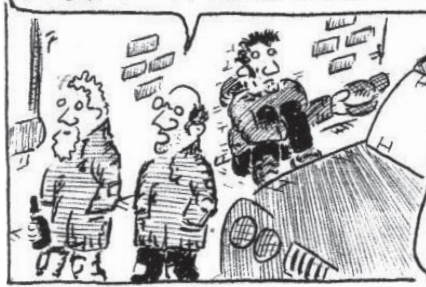


... WHICH NO ONE EVER DOES! WE JUST ACCEPT THIS AS THE NORM. ECONOMIC GROWTH IS UNQUESTIONABLY TAKEN AS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF OUR CULTURE, THE RAISON D'ETRE. IS THAT A GREAT STATE OF AFFAIRS?

... I'M READY TO ACCEPT CAPITALISM AS AN INNATE FEATURE OF HUMAN NATURE. BY 'CAPITALISM', I MEAN BUYING, SELLING, TRADING, SOME INDIVIDUALS AMASSING GREAT WEALTH, OTHERS DONT. HENCE INEQUALITY...



... 'NATURAL' FACETS OF THE HUMAN CHARACTER. BUT WE LEARNT NOT TO GLORIFY THESE TRAITS SOME TIME AGO. ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME WE DID THE SAME WITH THE GREED OF THE MARKET?...



... AND SOME INDIVIDUALS WILL WANT TO LEAVE THIS AMASSED WEALTH FOR THEIR OFFSPRING TO INHERIT, HENCE THE BASIS OF CLASS SYSTEMS. ALL THIS BEHAVIOUR MAY BE INNATE. MAYBE. BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT RIGHT, MAKE IT GOOD... OR EXCUSE IT. TRIBALISM AND WARFARE ARE ALSO PROBABLY INNATE...





Warren's Wallet

"Castles in France. Islands in the Caribbean. Private jets. With a collective \$1.27 trillion at their disposal, the members of The Forbes 400 could buy almost anything. How about a country? A quick glance at the CIA Fact Book suggests the individual fortunes of many Forbes 400 members are as big as some of the world's economies. Bill Gates, America's richest man with a net worth of \$50 billion, has a personal balance sheet larger than the gross domestic product of 140 countries, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Bolivia and Uruguay. The Microsoft visionary's nest egg is just short of the GDP of Tanzania and Burma. Warren Buffett, who lost \$10 billion in the past 12 months and is this year's Forbes 400 biggest dollar loser, still has a fortune the size of North Korea's economy at \$40 billion." (*Yahoo Finance*, 2 October)

Silent Tsunami

"Tens of millions of the world's poor will have their food rations cut or cancelled in the next few weeks because rich countries have slashed aid funding. The result, says Josette Sheeran, head of the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), could be the 'loss of a generation' of children to malnutrition, food riots and political destabilisation. 'We are facing a silent tsunami,' said Sheeran in an exclusive interview with the *Observer*. 'A humanitarian disaster is unrolling.' The WFP feeds nearly 100 million people a year." (*Observer*, 11 October)

Bombs wa-hey!

"The Pentagon comptroller sent a request to shift the funds to the House and Senate Appropriations and Armed Services Committees over the summer. The comptroller said the Pentagon planned to spend \$19.1 million to procure four of the bombs, \$28.3 million to accelerate the bomb's 'development and testing', and \$21 million to accelerate the integration of the bomb onto B-2 stealth bombers. The notification was tucked inside a 93-page 'reprogramming' request that included a couple hundred other more mundane items. Why now? The notification says simply, 'The Department has an Urgent Operational Need (UON) for the capability to strike hard at deeply buried targets in high threat environments. The MOP is the weapon of choice to meet the requirements of the UON.' It further states that the request is endorsed by Pacific Command (which has responsibility over North Korea) and Central Command (which has responsibility over Iran)." (ABC News, 6 October)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 5th. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

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Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail: 3491@bbarry.fs.com

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South West branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

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Newtownabbey. Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

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Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

Ayrshire. D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freeuk.com

Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

Cardiff and District. John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

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World Socialist Party of the United

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Out of control

SOME people are looking to China as the motor that will pull world capitalism out of its current slump. This ignores the fact that China's double-digit rates of growth were led by exports, in large part to America and Europe. When these parts of the world entered the slump China, too, was affected. As the *Times* reported last year (17 October):

"In the northern Chinese port of Quinhuandao, a dark mountain formed by nearly nine million tonnes of surplus coal soars from the dockside. By the end of the next week, the famous storage area – a dirty barometer of Chinese industrial demand – could be completely full of unwanted fossil fuel . . . [T] hose swelling piles of surplus coal, which is used for most of China's electricity generation, indicate falls in demand for energy, a key measure of economic activity."

In response the Chinese government decided to try to spend its way out. Some 4 trillion (a million million) yuan of stimulus money was injected into the economy, mainly in the form of lending by the State banks. But things didn't turn out as planned. Most of the money was used to expand productive capacity without regard for the chances of selling the extra output (though some seems to have gone to fund a property and stock exchange bubble). In an article headlined "Beijing moves to halt growth juggernaut as supply starts to run away from demand" (1 October), *Times* Asia business correspondent, Leo Lewis, reported:

"China's State Council calculates that the impact of this year's 140 billion yuan (£13 billion) investment spree in steel mills will be to lift overall national production capacity some 40 per cent above the country's entire annual demand. The same dynamics reportedly apply to cement (. . .) The astronomical levels of corporate investment, warn senior economists, place the booming Chinese economy at increased risk of a sudden collapse in growth."

So, the brakes are being applied:

"The Government of China has launched an attack on overcapacity in its heavy industries with a series of stinging curbs on new factories, smelting plants and port-building projects. (...) In the absence of such controls, said the statement from the Chinese Cabinet, 'it will be hard to prevent vicious market competition and to increase economic benefits, and this could result in facility closures, layoffs and increases in banks' bad assets.'"

It's the same old story of headlong capitalist expansion, financed in this case by government funding, leading in the end to overcapacity and overproduction in relation to market demand. The Chinese government's attempt to spend its way out of the slump is risking the very thing they were trying to overcome: "a sudden collapse in growth".

Which goes to show that governments can't control the way capitalism works and that, if they try, the chances are they'll make things worse. Capitalism is an uncontrollable economic system that gets its way in the end, one way or the other.

Who would have thought a wee little packet of fake blood could threaten to unravel an entire culture. But so great is the threat of the "Artificial Virginity Hymen" -- a kit that helps women fake their virginity -- that prominent Egyptian conservatives are calling for an all-out ban. Not only that, they are also demanding the exile of anyone who traffics it.

<http://tinyurl.com/ybwa2vp>

"What creationists believe about human origins we get from the Bible," said David Menton an acclaimed anatomist and also a creationist. "The creation of the world takes place on page one of the Bible. If you throw out the first page of the Bible you might as well throw out the whole thing. If you can't live with the first page then pitch out the remaining thousand pages."

<http://tinyurl.com/yelwnvm>

The gap between wealthiest 10 percent and the rest of America is worse than at any time on record. Two-thirds of all income gains from 2002-7 went to the top 1 percent. The Walton family alone is worth more than the bottom 100 million Americans combined. Wal-Mart is a major player in the "dead peasants insurance" game; it's alleged that dead peasant insurance payouts are used for executive bonuses:

<http://tinyurl.com/yh3p25r>

Amnesty International has highlighted a case of a man facing execution in Texas. The human rights group has revealed a Texas man faces execution after jurors at his trial consulted the Bible when deliberating his fate:

<http://tinyurl.com/yzctplu>

Israel is making preparations to carry out military attacks in Iran after December, a French magazine reported overnight Wednesday:

<http://tinyurl.com/yjkf8mj>

That Haiti needs the attention cannot be overstated. Unemployment hovers at around 70 percent, experts say, and over half of the population lives in extreme poverty. Violence broke out in June as students demanded an increase in the minimum wage to \$5 from \$1.75 — which were daily rates, not hourly ones. Haiti's extremely low labor costs, comparable to those in Bangladesh, make it so appealing:

<http://tinyurl.com/y9mnxpw>

When the Berlin Wall crumbled, East Germans imagined a life of freedom where consumer goods were abundant and hardships would fade. Ten years later, a remarkable 51% say they were happier with communism. About the same time a new Russian proverb was born: "Everything the Communists said about Communism was a lie, but everything they said about Capitalism turned out to be the truth."

<http://tinyurl.com/yek2lqm>

We are fast approaching the time of the next great battle over evolution. The Neo-creationists will be corporations, and they will argue that they could not possibly be descended from human beings...The rape case of Jamie Leigh Jones was just a logical step forward in the long-standing Republican effort to lock Americans out of the nation's courthouses, an effort undertaken on behalf of corporate supremacy. A woman is gang-raped by her fellow employees at government contractor KBR. The company says her contract prohibits her from seeking justice in court.

<http://tinyurl.com/yk33ans>

The fall of "Communism": Why so peaceful?

In late 1989 and early 1990, in the space of a few months, the "communist" regimes in a string of East European countries fell from power. They were soon followed by the "Soviet" regime in Russia itself, which collapsed in the wake of a failed coup in August 1991.

Almost everywhere the change occurred more or less peacefully. This seemed especially remarkable in light of the history of these regimes, which in the past had made ruthless use of violence to suppress opposition. In Russia three anti-coup protestors were killed while trying to halt and disable a tank. There was one major case of violent transition – Romania, where Ceausescu's dictatorship was overthrown in December 1989 at the cost of about 1,100 dead and several thousand wounded.

In Poland and Hungary, the ruling parties had already agreed to give up their power monopoly in 1988, when they entered negotiations with opposition forces to plan the details of the transition. In East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, they were not quite so willing to give way, but nor were they willing to do what was necessary to retain power – that is, crush the rising wave of popular protest by force.

A lack of will

The crucial immediate cause of the demise of the "communist" regimes was the fact that – except in Romania – they did not even make a serious attempt at violent suppression of opposition forces. They lacked the will to do so.

Consider, for instance, what happened at the Berlin Wall on 9 November, 1989. In response to a confusing announcement that the regulations for through passage were to be relaxed, a crowd gathered and started pushing their way past the guards.

The guards, heavily outnumbered, frantically telephoned various officials to ask whether they should use their firearms, but no one was willing to give them instructions. So they did nothing.

Even the coup plotters in Russia never gave the troops under their command orders to shoot into the crowds that were blocking their way. They too were reluctant to shed large amounts of blood, and that may well have been their undoing.

Why were all these "communist" officials so deficient in ruthlessness? In a few cases, including that of Gorbachev, humanitarian scruples or squeamishness may have played a part. For most of them, however, the main reason was probably a loss of inner confidence in the future of the state-capitalist system. They sensed that its transformation was inevitable. And accepting the inevitable was greatly eased for many of them by the expectation of doing no less well for themselves under private capitalism.

Nomenklatura capitalism

Historically, whether the transition from one type of class society to another is predominantly violent or peaceful has always depended on the ability of members of the old ruling class to adapt themselves to the new socio-economic relations and merge smoothly into the new ruling class. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, for instance, the British aristocrats merged into the rising capitalist class, while their French counterparts had to be overthrown in a violent upheaval.

In most cases, the transition from state to private capitalism has been closer to the "British" model. Many (though by no means all) "communist" bureaucrats, both in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, welcomed the privatisation of capital because they saw the opportunity to exploit their official positions to establish themselves as private capitalists.

This applied especially to top managers in the state ministries in charge of potentially lucrative industries like oil and gas, which could be – and were – reorganised as private (or mixed state-private) capitalist corporations. Lower-level managers and specialists were able to siphon off resources for private businesses now legalised under the guise of "cooperatives." Quite a few Communist Youth League officials also found ways to set up in business.

Far from all the "new" private capitalists were former members of the party-state "nomenklatura" (bureaucracy). In particular, quite a few emerged from the criminal underworld. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of "nomenklatura capitalism" was widespread enough to disillusion many activists of the "anti-communist" revolution, who concluded that there had been no real "revolution" at all.

Between Moscow and Brussels

In the East European countries another factor was at work. For sudden and unexpected as the "velvet revolutions" may have appeared at the time, the conditions that made

them possible had developed gradually over the previous decade or so.

Above all, Eastern Europe was no longer strictly within the sphere of Soviet influence. Soviet troops were being withdrawn from the region. The “Brezhnev doctrine”, which had justified military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, was dead. Hard-line East European leaders could no longer count on economic or military backing from Moscow: Gorbachev had made that clear to them. Lacking confidence in their own strength and accustomed to dependence on the Kremlin, they were not likely to act decisively on their own.

Moreover, a number of the East European countries (especially Poland) were deeply in debt – to the tune of over \$100 billion – to Western creditors, making them vulnerable to Western pressure. Their economic ties were increasingly with Western Europe rather than with the Soviet Union or one another. Close economic ties had developed between East and West Germany. Hungary was already seeking to join the EEC.

Thus, in terms of great power alignments, Eastern Europe in 1989 was a “grey zone” between Moscow and Brussels, in the middle of a process of reorientation from east to west. At some point this external shift was likely to trigger a corresponding internal change from state to private capitalism. Awareness of this reality weakened the resolve of “communist” leaders to struggle against the tide.

The counter-example of Romania

It is helpful to compare the cases of peaceful transition with the clear counter-example of Romania. Here the army, police and special security forces (Securitate) were ordered to disperse protesting crowds by force – and did so. As the popular rising escalated, however, the defence minister decided at a certain point to thwart Ceausescu’s orders and back his rival Iliescu. This split the army and security forces into opposing factions, which then fought one another until the capture, “trial” and execution of Ceausescu finally decided the issue.

In contrast to the collective leaderships of the other East European regimes, Ceausescu exercised a strict personal dictatorship. Thus, the views of a broader power elite, many of whom might have accepted the transition to private capitalism, carried little weight. And Ceausescu himself was certainly not lacking in

self-confidence or ruthlessness.

Moreover, he was largely independent of outside powers. He had broken Romania’s ties of dependence on the Soviet Union long before. Nor was he vulnerable to Western pressure: although he accepted loans from the West in the 1970s, he repaid them in full in the 1980s by exporting consumer goods (thereby exacerbating domestic shortages and discontent).

Would orders have been obeyed?

The “post-communist” transition was peaceful (except in Romania) because leaders did not try to retain power by force. But would they have succeeded had they tried? Would their orders have been obeyed?

It is impossible to be sure, but I think the answer is probably – yes, on the whole. Even a highly unpopular regime – and few can have been so deeply hated as Ceausescu’s – can crush an unarmed (or even lightly armed) populace so long as it has at

the duty to obey orders that clearly did come from a legitimate authority was never in question.

Implications for the transition to socialism

What implications does this have for the transition to socialism?

We might hope that when conditions are ripe the capitalist class will cede power as readily as the “communist” regimes did in most of Eastern Europe. If so, all the better. But there is reason to suspect that it might not happen that way.

In some respects, the transition from capitalism to socialism may be more difficult than past transitions from one type of class society to another. Members of the ruling class in one class society, be they British aristocrats or Russian bureaucrats, may accept the transition to a different class society in the expectation of being able to convert their privileges into a new form, but they can hardly hope to retain privileged status in a classless society.

In the World Socialist Movement, we consider it essential to aim at a peaceful transition to socialism. This is not only because we shrink from the prospect of bloodshed, though there is no shame in that. Above all, we reckon that in any violent confrontation with the capitalist state the working class faces the near-certainty of defeat and massacre – and the odds grow steadily worse as military technology advances.

It would be unnecessarily risky to count on all of the soldiers defecting to the side of the revolution. Special precautions will surely be taken to insulate the armed forces from the contagion of socialist ideas and bolster their discipline – that is, their readiness to obey

orders.

Under these circumstances, it is a foolhardy and dangerous anachronism to conceive of the socialist revolution in terms of a popular uprising. Of course, a popular movement is essential, but that movement must *constitute itself as the legitimate authority* in society through the democratic capture of the state. Even then it is conceivable that some people will try to take violent action against the socialist majority, but it will be much easier to thwart such people – if necessary, by using the armed forces against them.

STEFAN



Yeltsin addresses a crowd during the attempted coup of August 1991

its disposal disciplined armed forces equipped with modern weaponry. This is confirmed by recent experience in Iran and Honduras. As we have seen, the guards at the Berlin Wall were prepared to use their firearms if ordered to do so.

The likely outcome is harder to predict in the case of Russia during the attempted coup of August 1991. Soldiers and commanders were unsure what to do, but that was because with the president (Gorbachev) removed from the picture it was difficult to tell who constituted the legitimate authority – the plotters’ emergency committee, Yeltsin, or perhaps neither? (This created the possibility of civil war, as in Romania.) However,

On all sides we hear it said that “after 1917 a Marxist utopia was realised in our country,” that we had a “communist regime” or “socialist state,” that “we were building socialism and communism,” and so on. This makes it essential for us to grasp the true essence of Marxism, to understand what socialism and communism are.

From a scientific – in particular, Marxist – point of view, communism (or socialism, as Marx and Engels rarely distinguished between these two concepts) means an absolutely free society of universal equality and abundance, in which all people work – more precisely, seek self-realisation – voluntarily, in accordance with their abilities and inclinations, and receives goods in accordance with their needs.

This is the second stage, the phase of socialism or communism (or communism, strictly speaking). The first stage (or, more rarely, socialism in the narrow sense) means almost the same, with the sole difference that there is still some connection between how much labour an able-bodied person has given society and the quantity of goods that he or she receives.

But for Marx and Engels, as a rule, the words “socialism” and “communism” were synonyms.

And so, socialism or communism is the complete liberation of each person and all humanity from any form of exploitation and oppression! The government of people is replaced by the administration of things. The absence of any state power over people!

Socialism in a single country?

Marx and Engels categorically denied the possibility of establishing socialism or communism in a single country or in a few countries. They even denied the possibility of the sustained victory or success of a workers’ revolution in a single country – let alone in a backward or not very developed country. For a whole number of serious reasons.

Let us start with the fact that such concepts as “socialism” or “communism” are absolutely incompatible with the concept of “the state.” For a real Marxist, the very idea of a “socialist” or “communist” state is empty nonsense, the height of absurdity.

Of course, so long as another, hostile system exists, especially if it dominates the greater part of the planet, there can be no question of the state dying out. Let us imagine a state in which a workers’ revolution takes place but is not soon followed by a world revolution. That state is forced



to compete with other states in the surrounding world in the accumulation of armaments, heavy industry, and so on.

But competitive accumulation – of capital, in the final analysis – runs counter to the popular need to give priority to consumption. It prevents expansion of the conquests of the revolution and makes it necessary to preserve the state. Giving priority to consumption would require abolishing a fundamental feature of capitalist society – accumulation for the sake of accumulation. For this two conditions are needed: workers’ self-management (working people themselves taking control of production) and the elimination of national borders (that is, of competition on a world scale). The latter also requires abolition of the state.

An analysis from Russia makes many of the points we do.

From the elementary foundations of Marxism it follows that such phenomena as commodity-money relations and the law of value are absolutely incompatible with socialism. For capitalism, according to Marx and Engels, has two chief defining defects. First, goods have to be produced as commodities (for sale), in the form of commodities, thereby giving social relations a fetishized, mercantile character. Second, the basic purpose of production is the extraction of surplus value, which is the source of the exploitation of man by man.

It is self-evident that money and the state can only die out together.

Commodity-money relations cannot exist in the absence of state structures. For money is backed up by the assets of the state bank. Given commodity production, competition, the necessity for each state to compete economically with other states, a common measure of some sort is needed to calibrate inputs and outputs in comparison with other countries. Therefore, prices inevitably exist so that records can be kept of value. Finally, some way is needed to monitor the effectiveness of economic activity.

In order to realise the specifically capitalist tendency of accumulation for the sake of accumulation, two things are necessary. First, workers must be alienated from the means of production and from the results of their labour. Second, there must be competition between capitalists. In the absence of workers’ revolution on a global scale, the pursuit of surplus labour in the world as a whole inevitably thwarts any attempt to establish socialism, even if it is undertaken in a highly developed and wealthy region.

Socialism – a world system

Thus, socialism or communism can only be a world system. In this respect it resembles capitalism, which also arises at the international level, becoming a world system as it expands to absorb the pre-capitalist periphery. According to Marx, capitalism is characterised by the concentration of the means of production in the hands of a few, the organization of labour as social labour, and the creation of a world market. In principle, two world systems cannot exist simultaneously.

“Dictatorship of the proletariat”

For a long time the Bolsheviks

justified their dictatorship by calling it “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Marx used this term to mean not dictatorship as a repressive political regime but social dominance of the working people as a counterweight to the exploiters (while they still exist) – a workers’ semi-state. He put forward this idea in opposition to the idea, popular in his day, of the dictatorship of revolutionary leaders.

The democratic power of the working class, the conquest of true, broad democracy, and not the power of any leaders – that was and is the meaning of “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Undoubtedly, such a regime is not socialism. It is still capitalism, although of a milder and more democratic variety.

The Bolshevik party dictatorship

The Bolshevik party dictatorship has its origins in the upheaval of 1917. After the fall of the autocracy, Russia won great democratic freedoms and became (for a short time)

the broadest freedom and human rights, with political power exercised democratically through Soviets, trade unions and competing political parties.

The actual situation, alas, was nothing like this. Political power was exercised mainly through a dictatorship of the Bolshevik party and vanguard, with all forms of democracy restricted from the very first months. Yes, in the early years there were progressive, humane laws in various spheres. (To what extent they were observed is another question.) But the main trends were negative: further curtailment of democratic rights and freedoms, consolidation of the one-party system, secret police repression even within the ruling party, formation of a hierarchy of officials appointed from above.

Stalin’s industrial revolution

The Stalinist faction, which in 1925 had introduced the anti-Marxist conception of “building socialism in a single country,” gained full control by the end of the 1920s. The chief concern of the ruling group was now the forging of a “great power”; this required expansion of the industrial base through unrestrained exploitation of the working people – for the sake, above all, of successful competition

with the outside world, with foreign states. In practice, this meant the rapid accumulation of capital.

By the 1930s the authoritarian state had evolved into a totalitarian state. It was precisely at this period that the gap between the higher-ups and the masses deepened into an abyss. By means of so-called “collectivisation” the peasants were either, in essence, enserfed or driven from the soil and turned into a reserve labour force for industry. (Those who managed to get to the cities became, as a rule, hired workers.) Repression intensified, filling the rapidly expanding Gulag with prisoners.

During the first five-year plan, real wages declined by at least half, while the working day lengthened. Thus, the living standard of the absolute majority of the population fell substantially and exploitation sharply increased.

The Stalin regime was totalitarian state capitalism with significant elements of serfdom and slavery (which weakened but did not disappear even after the tyrant’s death). In practice, it accomplished an industrial revolution – that is, the accelerated accumulation of capital. To a large extent, this was primitive accumulation. We find pertinent parallels between industrialisation under Stalin and the path followed by Japan from the bourgeois “Meiji revolution” to World War Two. There too, capital grew rapidly. There too, despotic methods were used to modernise the economy, create an industrial base and strengthen military might, with the state playing a major role.

Thus, both under Stalin and later we had in Russia a right-wing dictatorship with a state monopoly over the economy. Stalinism is a broader concept than the Stalin regime. In the USSR, the Stalinist era lasted from the late 1920s until the collapse of the “Soviet” “socialist” system in 1991 (with various changes and modifications, of course).

Bureaucratic state capitalism

Stalinism is bureaucratic state capitalism. The bulk of direct producers did not own means of production and so were forced to sell their labour power to the real owner of those means of production – a special group called the nomenklatura. The members of this group belonged to a hierarchically organized system for the appropriation and distribution of surplus value. The ruling class of the Soviet Union was therefore a state bourgeoisie. It was an exploiting class that through the possession of state power owned the means of production, the whole of the so-called “national economy.”

In this way the traditional ultra-conservative status quo was re-established and the Russian Empire restored.

For several decades, both under Stalin and after his death, the ruling class or state bourgeoisie governed the country through a powerful and ramified bureaucratic apparatus. They relied on the age-old traditions of the Russian Empire and out of inertia continued to make formal and hypocritical use of pseudo-socialist, pseudo-communist, pseudo-left and pseudo-Marxist slogans. Such slogans were a convenient means of masking their real aims and playing on the sincere faith of many people, both inside the country and abroad.

Vladimir Sirotin, Moscow

(Translated by Stefan)



“Repression intensified, filling the rapidly expanding Gulag with prisoners”

the most democratic state in the world. However, the provisional government failed to act. It did not begin peace negotiations and made no attempt to get out of the war. It did not embark on agrarian reform. It took no measures against the forces of reaction. The people got neither peace nor bread nor land. What is more, despite all the rights and freedoms, strong democratic institutions (apart, perhaps, from the Soviets) were not created in the country. Thus, there was nothing surprising about the Bolshevik takeover. A reactionary military dictatorship was also a real possibility at the time.

The Bolshevik regime claimed the mantle of a workers’ state. However, in a workers’ state (more precisely, semi-state) there would have been

Workers State? Pull the other one

Incredible as it might seem millions believed that Russia under Stalin and his successors was some sort of “Workers State”. Most – those in and around the official “Communist” parties – thought it was a workers’ paradise, socialism even. A minority – the Trotskyists – wanted to have their cake and eat it: to claim credit for what they saw as Russia’s achievements but to repudiate the things they didn’t like. They called it a “degenerate Workers State”. One of these was the Belgian journalist and academic, Ernest Mandel (1923-1995), a biography of whom by Jan Willem Stutje *Ernest Mandel, A Rebel’s Dream Deferred* has just been published in English translation by Verso.

“Workers State” is a bit of a contradiction in terms, but if it is to mean anything it would have to mean that the workers controlled the state; which could only be done through some democratic mechanism. But the workers never controlled the state in Russia. Within a few years of the Bolsheviks seizing power in November 1917 they had suppressed all other parties and established a one-party dictatorship. While he was a member of the government Trotsky justified the description “Workers State” by arguing that the Bolshevik Party, which controlled the state, was the party of the workers who therefore controlled the state through it. When, however, he and his followers were banned too he could no longer use that argument. So, in the *Revolution Betrayed* (1936) he came up with another: that Russia was still a “Workers State” because most industry was nationalised, there was central planning and a state monopoly of foreign trade. This, despite his admission that state power was actually controlled by a privileged “bureaucracy” and his producing statistics to show that the workers were badly off and oppressed.

This argument was so absurd that it soon aroused criticism within the ranks of his own followers. Some refused to describe a state in which the workers were oppressed and powerless as a “Workers State”. They disagreed about what to call it – some saw it as a new exploitative class society, others as “state capitalism” – but agreed that it wasn’t any kind of “Workers State”, not even a degenerate one. Trotsky stuck to his “degenerate Workers State” theory till one of its agents assassinated him in 1940.

Mandel had become a Trotskyist while still a teenager and during the war took part in underground Trotskyist activity in Belgium where his family lived. He was caught in 1944 and spent the remainder of the war in labour camps in Germany. After the war he emerged as one of the leaders of the Trotskyist “Fourth International”. One of the photos in this book is of a meeting of six leaders of this organisation in Paris in 1948. Of the six two had or came to regard Russia as state-capitalist. But not Mandel. He stuck to Trotsky’s dogma, and even extended it, describing the puppet regimes Russia set up in eastern Europe as “deformed Workers States”.



Dogma

In 1969, in a polemic against Michael Kidron, of the International Socialism group of Trotskyists (later the SWP) who argued that Russia was state capitalist, Mandel wrote:

“Ever since social-democratic opponents of the Russian October revolution hatched the theory of ‘capitalism’ continuing to exist in the Soviet Union, supporters of that theory have been faced with a difficult choice. Either they consider that Russian ‘capitalism’ has all the basic features of classic capitalism as analysed by Marx, to start with generalized commodity production, and that it also shows all the basic contradictions of capitalism, including capitalist crisis of overproduction— and then they have a hard time discovering evidence for this. Or they admit the obvious fact that most of these features are absent from the Soviet economy, and they then have to contend that these features are not ‘basic’ to capitalism anyhow, which in the last analysis only means exploitation of wage-labour by ‘accumulators’.” (*The Inconsistencies of State Capitalism*, p. 11).

As a matter of fact the social and economic system in Russia did exhibit the basic features of capitalism: minority control of the means of production (via nationalisation); generalised commodity production (i.e. generalised production for sale and the use of money); the accumulation of capital valued in money out of profits; and, in particular, yes, the exploitation of wage-labour by those who monopolised the means of production. Of course there were differences from what Mandel called here “classic” capitalism, due to the specific circumstances under which the system had come into being and developed which had resulted in a hugely increased economic role for the state. Hence state capitalism. In any event, even if Mandel’s narrow definition of capitalism as private enterprise is accepted, that would not make Russia into any kind of “Workers State”, only some new form of exploitative class society.

Disappointment

After discussing the “increasing rights for factory managers” then being granted as part of economic reforms introduced by the Russian government, Mandel declared:

"We are therefore convinced that capitalism could be restored in the Soviet Union or in any Eastern European country only after breaking the fierce resistance of the working class. (...) Given the present constellation of social forces, both nationally and internationally, we think it very unlikely that this resistance could actually be broken under these conditions, and that capitalism could be restored either in the Soviet Union, or in Yugoslavia, or in any other bureaucratically degenerated or deformed workers' state." (p. 16)

When this happened (and we, neither, saw this happening within twenty years) the working class put up no resistance to the transition from state capitalism to a more "classic" type of capitalism. Clearly, they did not share the same illusion as Mandel about Russia and its satellites being some sort of workers' regime and so worth defending. Because Mandel and his Fourth International did believe the workers would resist, they placed great hope in the outcome of events in eastern Europe in the 1980s, trying to establish Trotskyist cells there. According to Stutje, they had some rather limited success in Poland and Czechoslovakia. But the outcome – a full return to "classic" capitalism rather than a regenerated "Workers State" – must have been a great disappointment. In fact, reading between the lines of this biography, Mandel never seems to have recovered from it.

Earlier Mandel had offered his expert advice as an economist to one of the "deformed Workers States" – Cuba when Che Guevara was Minister of Industry between 1961 and 1964. He visited Cuba a number of times and supported Guevara's view that enterprises should be financed by direct grants from the central government and not be instructed to balance the books from their own activities. In other words, he was in favour of a much more centralised form of state capitalism than existed (or was eventually adopted).

Having said this, when it came to writing about "classic" capitalism Mandel was not too bad. In his *Marxist Economic Theory* (1962 in French, 1968 in English translation) he set out to show, on the basis of contemporary facts (and not just on the facts from the 1850s and 1860s that Marx had used), how Marx's analysis of capitalism was still valid. The English hardback edition was divided into two volumes, the first of which, dealing with Marx's theories, can still be recommended (the second part, dealing with the theories of Lenin and Trotsky and the nature of Russian society relapsed into Trotskyist scholasticism). His introductions to the Penguin edition of the three volumes of *Capital* are also good, as is his short pamphlet *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory*, even though it introduces

the dubious concept of "neo-capitalism", which he later called "late capitalism".

Duplicity

Politically, Mandel was a dyed-in-the-wool Trotskyist, explaining every working class failure by a lack of the right leadership, i.e. of a Trotskyist vanguard. He also practised the dishonest Trotskyist tactic of "entryism", joining the reformist Belgian "Socialist"

Party in 1951, with a view to winning a leftwing following which he hoped to lead out of the party to form an open Trotskyist vanguard party. He achieved some success, even rising to be for a short while the editor of the BSP's daily paper, *Le Peuple*. He lost this post when another paper he helped edit, *La Gauche*, criticised the party's leadership. *La Gauche* advocated "structural reforms" of capitalism, basically the nationalisation of the holding companies which dominated the Belgian economy. This was popular amongst many workers in the coal, steel and manufacturing industries of the French-speaking part of Belgium, and Mandel managed to get the support of some of the union leaders and local politicians there.

According to Stutje, it was not until 1961 that Mandel told one of the trade union leaders that he was a Trotskyist:

"Until now Mandel had always kept quiet about his membership of the Fourth International. Now it was time to break the silence. He went to Yerna's office and confessed to his bewildered friend, 'I need to tell you the truth. I am a member of the Fourth International.' Yerna was disappointed that his comrade had not trusted him sooner" (pp. 80-1).

In the end, as later with Militant in Britain, the inevitable happened. In 1964 Mandel and his followers were booted out of the BSP. In a letter to Ken Coates (then a fellow Trotskyist, later a Labour MEP) that year he told him: "A left wing had been built in the Socialist Party from 1961 on, accompanied by an autonomous, clandestine Trotskyist core group" (emphasis added).

According to Stutje,

"The question of when, where and how to leave the SP was clearly on the agenda from the early 1960s. Mandel had only wanted to make sure they left with a substantial group – and by that he meant thousands" (p. 85).

In the event, the main trade union leader he had relied on went off at a tangent and embraced Walloon (i.e. French-speaker) nationalism and Mandel left with a few hundred only. But a new bandwagon soon came along – student unrest – and he was able to jump on that, influencing student leaders such as Alain Krivine in France, Tariq Ali in Britain (both of whom became Trotskyists) and, to a lesser extent, Rudi Dutschke in Germany (who didn't but, like Daniel Cohn-Bendit, eventually joined the Greens). Tariq Ali, though no longer a Trotskyist but still an admirer of Mandel, has written the foreword to Stutje's biography.

Mandel was perfectly aware of what socialism really was as he had written in his polemic with Kidron:

"socialism means a classless society. It therefore presupposes not only the suppression of private property of the means of production, henceforth managed in a planned way by the associate producers themselves, but it also calls for a level of development of the productive forces which makes possible the withering away of commodity production, of money, and of the state." (p. 17)

According to him, however, the productive forces had not yet reached the necessary level of development, so socialism was not an immediate possibility. Only a new society – based on nationalisation, planning and a state monopoly of foreign trade – was. He called it "transitional society" but it would only have been a form of state capitalism and state capitalism is not, as the experience of Russia in the last century showed, a step towards socialism. It turned out to be, in the joke circulating towards the end of the regime, "the longest route between capitalism and capitalism".

ADAM BUICK



Ernest Mandel

The campaign to win the young to war has come a long way from the 'Your Country Needs You' poster with the pointing finger of Kitchener used in the 'First Great War'.

Joining the killing machine

vil-
lage
quali-
ties; typi-
cal of an old
English town in all

respects but one: every
corpse that returns from

Great
War. The
Cenotaph is in Lon-
don's Whitehall, a
stones throw from
Downing Street
where all deci-
sions of war have
been taken and
plotted particularly in

the last and current century. This year's remembrance falls in the year that marks the 70th anniversary and outbreak of the Second World War and as usual the Queen and her Royal Family dressed-up as Fleet Admirals, Air Marshals and Field Marshals with medals and self-awarded honours, will join our political leaders in honouring by this act of remembrance the war dead who, we are told time and again, gave their lives for the freedoms that we (supposedly) enjoy today.

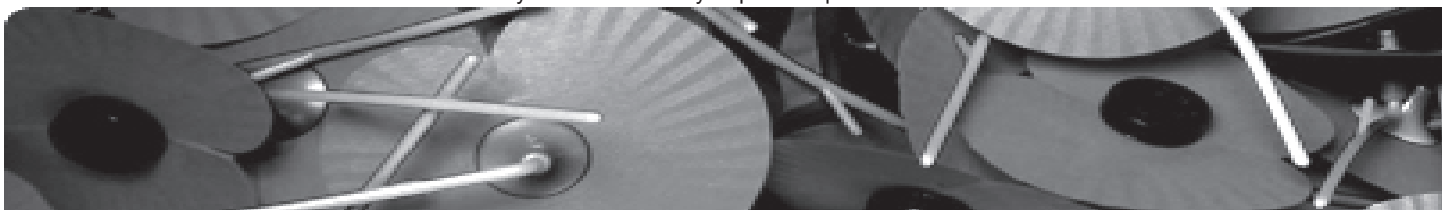
During the summer with its cricket field, pubs and a centuries-old church Wootton Bassett became the focuses of international media attention, not unfortunately because of its idyllic picturesque

Britain's wars abroad passes through it. In what has become a public show of respect? Wootton Bassett is near Royal Air Force Lyneham, the base to which the country's war dead are returned. Commencing about two years ago, townspeople began gathering for the processions of each soldier as the body, in a flag-draped casket, was moved from Lyneham to a coroner's office in Oxford. The inaugural processions were attended by just a dozen saluting war veterans at first. Crowds then swelled to the thousands when the repetition of these sad processions became commonplace as the convoy of coffins through Wootton Bassett turned from a trickle to a stream.



As is usual at this time of the year, we are called upon to remember the dead, the fallen of wars; not only two 'World Wars' but of recent continuing wars in far away places. Poppies sold, a festival of remembrance held and televised, boy-scouts, girl-guides, sea, air and army cadets, new and old soldiers march down to the local war memorial to repeat that yearly ritual, customary observance and practice.

The main event is held at the Cenotaph, the monument built to honour people whose remains are interred elsewhere or whose remains cannot be recovered and lie scattered across the fields and arable land of France; as was and still is the case for many casualties of that First



Newspapers carried front page coverage that included pictures of mothers, fathers, wives, children and in some cases distraught girlfriends of the fallen. Anyone who picks up a newspaper or owns a television set cannot have failed to miss the risks that are involved and taken by the young in the modern

was that
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proven to be oh so deadly.

Every now and again, Brown and Cameron, before the exchange of insults during questions to the Prime Minister, will pay a tribute of hollow words acknowledging deceased military personnel. But with the public witnessing the return of young military casualties the pendulum of public opinion began to stick and stay put on questioning or opposing the military mission. The government during the summer, sensing the public perception, gave support to the first ever armed forces day, the idea being that parades and ceremonies would be held in every community around the war memorial to honour the role and function of armed forces personnel past and present - to use government language - honouring their commitment. This year's main national celebration was held at the Historic Dockyard in Chatham, Kent. The official party included Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his wife Sarah, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, and the Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup.

The Somme, 1916

Brown said:
"The people that have come here today have shown the high esteem and regard in which they hold the Armed Forces of our country. The Armed Forces who do so much, the families who make such sacrifices. I don't

think we say thank you enough, today is our chance to say it and say it with one voice, thank you very much to our Armed Forces."

Brown's comments, were, if nothing

else, very telling about government and military strategists' concerns and about having public opinion on side. If opinion is off side, then one thing is for sure and that's that it's not directed against service personnel who are merely uniformed workers, working like any other workers under instructions. The British armed forces have some of the most difficult and far-flung commitments to maintain. Major commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq co-exist with others from peacekeeping in Cyprus to patrolling the Falkland Islands. To meet these commitments, an estimate is made of the required number of trained full-time personnel, known as the 'trained requirement'. The actual number of trained personnel, known as the 'trained strength', is usually slightly less than requirement. The trained requirement in 2007 stood at 183,610; the trained strength stood at 177,760, of which 99,280 were in the army, 34,940 in the navy and 43,550 in the air force.

In terms of personnel, the UK regular armed forces are the third-largest in Europe after Germany and France. Britain is the world's largest military spender after of course the US, and its armed forces being the most stretched in the world, over £2 billion is spent each year on recruiting and training 20,000 new personnel to replace those who either leave or are killed on active duty. The armed forces, as the statistics show, draw their non-officer recruits mainly from among young people with low educational accomplishment living in poor communities. A large proportion joining for disadvantaged reasons, including the lack of civilian career choices; a survey in the Cardiff area in 2004 found that 40 percent of army recruits were joining as a last resort and the army revealed in 2004 that while roughly 45 percent of all young people leave school with 5 GCSE subjects graded A-C only, 17 percent of all Army recruits in 2003-04 had English at A-C level, with the figure for Maths at about 10 percent. On average Army recruits have 0.9 of a GCSE at grade A-C. ... Records also show that 24 percent of all Army applicants in 2003-04 were unemployed for a significant period before applying.

The killing locomotive that is the army always needs fuel to feed into its boiler, so tens of thousands of pounds are spent on newspapers and the media convincing youngsters to sign away (no apology) their lives. On the way back from visiting a friend, I found one of those free

newspapers that are handed out every evening at tube stations in London and lying on the seat next to me on the train on which I was travelling, what caught my eye was a double-page spread advertisement placed in the London *Metro* by the army and, I assume, acting on instructions from the Ministry of Defence and the government. The advertisement carried the image of a beautiful young woman in combat fatigues. I have no reason to believe that this young person isn't a serving member of the armed forces and with the looks of a model.

The advert had a personal testimony of army life given by Major Laura Blair, 31, (can you believe that name) who is a member of the Adjutant General's Corps; they apparently specialise in HR Personnel. Laura, if she does exist, says wonderful things about army life and ends by advising anyone who may be interested in an army career to either pop into one of the Army Careers Offices dotted around London or visit the Army Show Rooms in Hounslow or Dalston to find out just what life in uniform could offer them.

Recruitment literature for army careers emphasises potential benefits: career interest and challenge, comradeship, the active lifestyle, travel and training opportunities. It omits to mention or obscures even blots out: the radical change from a civilian to a military lifestyle, ethical issues involved in killing, risks to physical and mental health, the legal obligations of enlistment, the state's legal and moral obligations to its armed forces personnel, and the right of conscientious objection. By suggesting that soldiers are highly satisfied with army life, the literature also glosses over the ambivalent attitudes of the majority. The omissions conspire against the potential recruit's right and responsibility to make an informed choice about whether to enlist. The literature also does little to enable parents to ask searching questions of their children and of recruiters in order to assure their children's best interests.

One thing that remains the same about war is that workers fight it and die in it, and that's best summed-up by the last surviving soldier to have fought in the trenches of the First World War who died earlier this year: Henry John "Harry" Patch (17 June 1898 - 25 July 2009) - known as 'the Last Tommy'. Harry, apparently, hated war, and called it "organised murder, and nothing less."

NL

AFGHANISTAN

Lying about dying

The pressure to misinterpret the deaths, as the bodies come back, as nobly purifying is a cynically orchestrated propaganda exercise intended to justify the war.

Among the rituals so consoling to our Servants of the People in Westminster is the solemn roll call of the names of recently fatal casualties of the Afghanistan war proceeding to formulaic assurances of grief, of sympathy for family and friends and an assertion, defiant of a mass of disruptive facts, that from the dead will blossom a victory to bring a happier, freer Afghanistan and a safer Britain. All of this will happen, argue the MPs, through some process so far undefined. Meanwhile it is notable that the casualties' names are exclusively those of members of the British armed forces; the fighters on the other side and the hapless Afghan people who die terrified in their homes from the blast of the missiles do not get a mention. It is all very satisfactory for the Honourable Members on the green benches, dreaming of their expense claims while scheming of how most effectively to avoid any too probing questions from their constituents about the policy of satisfying the appetite of that voracious war.

This is reflected in the style of the heavily publicised repatriation of the dead soldiers, brought in flag-draped coffins to a military airfield and, after a ceremonial unloading, paraded through the streets of the nearby town – all carefully orchestrated and recorded by the TV news cameras. It would be a very brave person who defied this official smothering of doubts about the reasons for the troops being in Afghanistan. Part of this disreputable process is the eulogising of the dead who, one after another, are remembered, each in their own way, as a rare combination of courage, good humour, compassion, intellectual power...An example of this receptive attitude was a full page article by Audrey Gillan – who has some direct experience of Afghanistan – in the *Guardian* of 23 September about the late Corporal Michael Lockett: "...one of the most affable and funniest...one of the most courageous...handsome face and bright blue eyes flickering...Each time I met him I admired (him) more..." In another case – which did not have the advantage of being written up by a doting journalist – a dead soldier was praised because he had "loved" being a sniper – loved, in other words, practising his craft of abruptly and clinically killing people as if there can be no higher human talent.

Two Friends

But among the hysteria a more sombre and realistic event intruded – a young man by the name of Barry Delaney in a woman's dress weeping for his best friend

Kevin Elliott who was killed in an ambush in August. Three years ago the two agreed that if Elliott was killed Delaney would attend his funeral dressed like a woman. On his last leave Elliott told Delaney that he was terrified to go back to Afghanistan and could see no proper reason for the British army being there. Delaney is chronically unemployed, living in Dundee where there is a persistent problem – which Elliott avoided by joining the army when he left school at 16. In this context it is particularly pertinent that the Ministry of Defence report a 25 per cent rise in army recruits in this year of the recession – more than at any other time since 2005.

Delaney and Elliott do not conform to the stereotype so lovingly fostered onto us by media hacks. Elliott told of many ingloriously gruesome episodes, such as while trying to leave the battle under fire having to scoop up from the dust the body parts and internal organs of another soldier. Experiences like that are likely, in every case except the most hardened or resistant, to devastate a person's morale so as to insert unforeseen, unwelcome and unmanageable aspects into their personality so damaging as to make the effect endure for a long time after the immediate experience has expired. The *Guardian* quotes Professor Tim Robbins, former head of trauma and stress services at St. George's Hospital: "If we are asking people to do appalling things, to take part in regular firefights and hand-to-hand combat, you get to the stage where it de-sensitises them to violence".

Prisoners

The durability of these effects was illustrated by a recent survey by NAPO, the Probation Officers' trade union, which estimated that there are over 20,000 ex-service personnel – over twice as many as are in Afghanistan – being processed by the criminal justice system such as police, courts, prisons and the like. Of these 8,500 have committed offences serious enough to get them sent to prison, making a tenth of the total prison population and the largest single identifiable occupational group there. In many cases their offences were the immediate result of excessive consumption of alcohol or drugs, or both. The most common offence was for domestic violence, usually by men on their wives as an anarchic response to the stress of the discipline required by a close living relationship. Typical examples are, firstly by a man who went through two spells in active war zones: "Hard to reconcile the devastation, horror and distress of the war with the comfortable life"

and secondly a man who in his first few days in the Iraq war saw a friend blown up; he now has nine previous convictions beginning in 2005, of which two were for domestic violence and he is known by his ex-partners as a “Jekyll and Hyde” character. Facts like these throw serious doubt on the official propaganda, abetted by the media weasels, that the British forces in Afghanistan are unique in being impeccably mannered and humane. In addition they raise the question of whether Kevin Elliott was driven to join up when he left school because the army offered him better prospects than a life on the bread-line.

Torture

An example of how soldiers, of whatever nationality, are liable to respond to the everyday stress of militarism was the case of Baha Mousa, who was working as a receptionist in a Basra hotel until the day in September 2003 when 120 British soldiers (from a group known as “The Grim Reapers”) raided the hotel and took him, with nine others, into detention at the Battle Group Main camp. It was there that Baha Mousa – called “fat boy” or “fat bastard” by the soldiers – was subjected to a process of “conditioning” – or more accurately torture – until he died with 93 separate injuries to his body including a broken nose and fractured ribs. A video recording shows Baha Mousa, with other detainees, hooded and forced into stress positions, being screamed at, abused and threatened. At the subsequent enquiry there was evidence suggesting that Baha Mousa was arrested and tortured because he had complained after seeing some of the soldiers breaking open a safe in the hotel and stealing money. One of the soldiers admitted to this but probably did not help his case by saying he wanted the money “to make a collage”. There was a court martial but, in what looked suspiciously like a closing of ranks, the blame was focussed on only one of the soldiers, who then had to plead guilty to inhumane treatment while the others were acquitted. Counsel for the Ministry of Defence did his best for his majestic client by apologising for the “brutal violence” and “appalling behaviour” of the soldiers. Which left just the government and the media to do their best to plaster over such an embarrassing episode and insist that things are different now, as the soldiers go about the business of killing and of being killed in Afghanistan.

Distress

The pressure on us to misinterpret the deaths, as the bodies come back, as nobly purifying is a cynically orchestrated propaganda exercise intended to justify the war, to obscure the fact that the great powers’ interest in Afghanistan does not arise from any concern for the people of that country but from its position in an area vital to the interests of those powers, rather like the situation when it was an unwilling participant in the “Great Game” of Victorian imperialism. It is almost as a grisly tradition, that those same powers should readily support any Afghan tribal ruler no matter how corrupt and repressive – and that so many of the attempts to control the place through conquest have failed. It is hardly surprising that some of the soldiers should begin to ask why they are there and what the end will be for it all. The official response is to promote a massive lie with insidious propaganda fashioned to strait-jacket any tendency to dissent from the popular delusions. The killing goes on as the government gambles that their lies will be more acceptable than the distress of facing reality.

IVAN



Free is cheaper?

ON 12 October the London *Evening Standard* converted itself from a paying into a free newspaper, claiming to be the first “free quality newspaper”. That’s a bit pretentious since, as class-conscious Londoners know, the *Evening Standard* has been a consistently anti-working class rag opposing any strike by London workers, and a rag remains a rag even if it’s free.

Ironically, a couple of months earlier its business page had commented:

“It had to happen: after the £1 store, came the 99p variety, and now the 89p shop is on the way. Retail Week says the Annauth family, who dreamt up the 89p store (“at least 10p cheaper than elsewhere”) in Dorset, will create 20 jobs. They intend to open other branches. Soon, there will be the 79p store, then 69p. In fact, why not have the ‘nothing store’ and have done with it?” (17 August)

Why not indeed and that’s what will happen in socialism (though the quality will be much higher than the shoddy sold in these shops today). But we’re living in capitalism, so how can a paper be free and still make a profit? From advertising, stupid. What newspapers are selling is not so much news to their readers as advertising space to advertisers. To this they do of course have to attract readers and so contain material of interest to them or which fits in with their views or prejudices. But that’s not their main purpose, nor their main source of income.

The more readers a paper has the wider the audience of potential buyers it can offer advertisers. Requiring people to pay inevitably puts some off and so reduces readership. Hence the rise of the free, give-away paper. There are already a number of London-wide free papers and competition from them has affected *Evening Standard* sales. So, under its new owner, Russian oligarch Alexander Lebedev, its business strategists have decided to bank on an increased readership from being free bringing in more in advertising revenue than the loss of revenue from sales. As Dan Sabbagh explained in the Times (9 October):

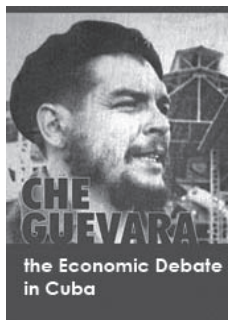
“This is a title that sold about 450,000 copies as recently as five years ago, but competition from freesheets (including News International’s thelondonpaper) pushed its paid-for sales down to 110,000 in August. At that sort of level, cover price income of a miserable £10 million or so is so small that it might be worth gambling on a massive increase in advertising income by printing twice the number of copies and giving them away.”

Even before he became a socialist Marx had remarked that “the primary freedom of the press lies in not being a trade” (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/free-press/ch06.htm). That’s a good point. The commercial newspapers, which proclaim themselves the “Fourth Estate” and trumpet that they are essential defenders of our “freedom”, are not a free press at all. What they mean by freedom of the press is the freedom for them as newspaper businesses to print what they like without government interference or any degree of democratic control.

The only free press today is small-circulation magazines like us whose main concern is to get ideas across, not to make a profit. And in socialism all papers will be free to take and read – and free also of commercial advertising.

Che in power

***Che Guevara and the Economic Debate in Cuba.* By Luiz Bernardo Pericás. Atropos. New York, 2009**



Guevara's cult status rests on the fact that he was a martyr to his cause, fighting to free the poor in the Third World from oppression and exploitation (by US imperialism).

Pericás probably thinks he is enhancing Guevara's image in describing what he did when he was a member of the Cuban government from 1959 to 1965, two years before he met his death in Bolivia. In fact he reveals what would have happened in the event of the guerrilla-led peasant insurrections that Guevara championed triumphing.

In Cuba Guevara was successively head of the National Bank and Minister of Industry. As such he played a key role in the construction of state capitalism in Cuba, even though he thought he was constructing "socialism" as a step towards the moneyless "communist" society that he seems to have genuinely wanted. According to Andrew Sinclair in *Guevara*, "he dreamed of the single wage-scale in which everybody would earn the same wage or would earn according to needs until money could be abolished altogether". This may have been his longer-term dream but equal wages was not what he introduced when he was Minister of Industry.

The policy the Cuban government pursued (made all the more necessary by the US embargo) was to industrialise the country on the same sort of lines as Russia had done, putting in place the same structures: a one-party state, state enterprises, integration of the trade unions into the state, a harsh labour discipline banning strikes, imposing labour passbooks and severely punishing absenteeism. As can be seen from this book, Guevara implemented and justified all these things. Hardly freedom from oppression and exploitation. The same thing happened in Vietnam.

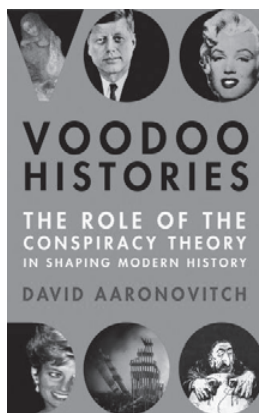
Pericás's book details the discussions that went on while Guevara was a member of the Cuban government and amounts to an

economic history of Cuba during this period. The translation (from Portuguese, as the author is from Brazil) is not perfect. If the author had proof-read himself he would surely have changed "mercantile production" to the more familiar "commodity production" and "good" to "commodity".

ALB

Conspiraloons

***Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History.* By David Aaronovitch, published by Jonathan Cape, 2009**



Perhaps the most disastrous of all conspiracy theories is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This is largely based on a book written by a Parisian lawyer in

the 1860s as a satire on Napoleon III. It was altered later in the nineteenth century by a Russian secret policeman to depict a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. The man who popularised the *Protocols* around the world was the capitalist Henry Ford. Published by Ford's publishing house in the 1920s (along with other anti-semitic literature), subsidised with five million dollars, it sold half a million copies in the US alone. After mounting complaints about his anti-semitism Ford recanted and apologised, but Adolf Hitler saw him as a hero and the *Protocols* formed the basis of his world-view in his manifesto *Mein Kampf*. The rest, as they say, is history. Aaronovitch thoroughly demolishes this conspiracy theory, as he does with the alleged conspiracies in Stalin's show trials, McCarthyism, the deaths of President Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, Diana, the story underpinning Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* (in a chapter entitled "Holy Blood, Holy Grail, Holy Shit"), the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon (in which some claim the Bush government were complicit) and more besides.

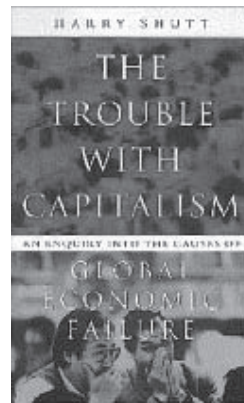
Aaronovitch argues that belief in

conspiracy theories is harmful since it "distorts our view of history and therefore of the present" and can lead to disastrous decisions. He detects a pattern in which conspiracy theories are "formulated by the politically defeated and taken up by the socially defeated". Conspiracies become an excuse to explain away a movement's own inherent weaknesses or unpopularity by attributing blame to a ruthless enemy. Aaronovitch claims that capitalism is not the cause of conspiracy theories since "[s]tate ownership in Russia was no guarantee against the most fabulous of conspiracy theories". But this mistakenly assumes that state ownership is incompatible with capitalism. When President Bush effectively nationalised some financial institutions in last year's "credit crunch" this was done for the benefit of American capitalism as a whole. In any case, capitalism's continued existence does not require a conspiracy or a conspiracy theory. All it requires is the support, or more likely acquiescence, of the overwhelming majority in their own exploitation.

LEW

Boom and bust

***The Trouble with Capitalism.* By Harry Shutt, Zed books.**



It is easy to see why the publishers have re-issued this book that first came out in 1998 – in it Shutt argued that a devaluation of capital assets could not be avoided for ever and

that when it eventually did happen it would take the form of a big crash.

Mat Little, who interviewed Shutt for *Red Pepper* this January, summarised what Shutt sees as the contradiction of capitalism that leads to recurring business cycles of boom and bust:

"According to Marx, capitalism is a system of accumulation. Profits are made but can't all be consumed by owners. Extra profits need to be recycled through the market. The only way you can successfully recycle them is to either expand your existing business or diversify into

another business,' says Shutt. 'It all depends on the ultimate consumer, consuming more and more. It has to grow, growth is built in.' The problem is that as profits are invested into the market, generating more profits that in turn have to be reinvested, production expands until it reaches a level that can no longer be absorbed by consumers. The market is glutted, and recession results. But the destruction of capital and jobs creates pent-up demand for the whole process to begin again in time. That, in brief, is the business cycle." (www.redpepper.org.uk/Prophet-of-doom)

Although Shutt does not write as a Marxist, this is one of the explanations of the capitalist business cycle put forward by some in the Marxist tradition. It implies that all capitalist crises are caused by the overexpansion (in relation to paying demand) of the sector producing consumer goods. But while the crash of 1929 can be explained in this way, the history of capitalism shows that the overexpansion of any key sector or industry can provoke a contraction of production through a knock-on effect on the rest of the economy.

Shutt explains the 25-year period of expansion after the end of WW2 in terms of the satisfaction of the market for affordable consumer durables and the end of this post-war boom as a result of the slowing down of this market. Capitalist enterprises were thus, he says, left with a 'mountain of cash', profits which could not be re-invested in expanding production, which he also describes as a 'capital glut' in the sense of an oversupply of investible funds.

What would normally happen in such a situation is that, in accordance with the law of supply and demand, capital would be devalued; which a crisis would bring about, so restoring the rate of profit (because this is calculated as profit divided by the value of capital). Only, according to Shutt, this did not happen on any large scale in 1974 because the authorities (governments and central banks) took steps to try to stop this, by facilitating the channelling of the surplus of investible funds into non-productive activities such as lending to consumers or speculation on the stock exchange or in property:

"This massive flow of funds – which is not being allowed, as would be dictated by traditional capitalist rationale, to self-destruct through the natural operation of the business cycle – has to find an outlet in

more or less speculative forms of investment." (p. 179)

Writing in 1998 Shutt saw the various financial crises till then – the stock market crash of 1987, the Mexican debt crisis of 1994-95, the financial problems of the Asian 'tiger economies' in 1997 – as signs that this was not sustainable and as harbingers of the Big Crash to come. Now, with the bursting of the dotcom bubble in between, he sees the Crash of 2008 as the expected big one:

"What the prolonged amassing of this huge surplus of capital cum fraud-driven credit bubble, means, according to Shutt, is the inevitable crash – the inexorable end of the business cycle – is going to be far more severe than it would otherwise have been. 'I think we are looking at negative growth, for an absolute minimum of two or three years and I wouldn't be surprised if it's five or ten. That would be a depression,' he says." (*Red Pepper* interview).

Since our failure to foresee the post-war boom with our prediction that WW2 would most likely be followed by a slump, just as after WW1, we have tended to be wary of making such predictions ourselves. So, we will just record this as the opinion of one person who has studied the matter.

ALB

Ya Basta!

Enough. By John Naish: Hodder £7.99.



Naish coins the word *enoughism* to describe the idea that most people's material wants are satisfied, so we should not aim to consume yet more. In a

world where more people are obese than starving, we need to draw a limit to what we eat or otherwise buy. If you are earning the median income for the country you live in, striving to earn more is unlikely to make you happier, and even the filthy rich (with over \$125 million) don't feel much more contented than the average worker. Don't try to earn more by working more, since long hours of employment are bad for you. Working over 41 hours per week is likely to give you high blood pressure, while

voluntary work tends to increase the life span.

It is surprising to be told that 'In the Western world we have now effectively have everything we could possibly need'. This ignores the extent of homelessness and other kinds of want that exist even in relatively prosperous societies; one child in three in Britain lives in poverty, for instance. Even basic needs like food, warmth and shelter are not met for many, many people.

But Naish does have some interesting things to say about consumer society. With many goods, we are offered not a genuine choice but a whole range of trivial 'options' that are really all the same (whether it is a matter of shampoo or digital cameras). Cars and fashion are further clear examples of where people are pressured into having the latest innovation. All-you-can-eat buffets are becoming increasingly popular: though don't they really show that people are not that well off after all, as well as how they behave in a society of scarcity when the constraints are temporarily removed?

It's unlikely that socialism will be a kind of consumer paradise, and the notion of enoughness will probably apply, since there will be no profit motive to persuade people into having the latest of everything. We have no reason to think that he's a socialist, but Naish does see some of the implications of a truly human society when he writes of the need to 'explore anew our old, nourishing and truly sustainable natural human resources – qualities such as gratitude, generosity and the urge for human connection'.

PB

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case

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Meetings

London Winter Film Programme

Sundays at 6pm at 52 Clapham High St.

1 November -- *The Fog of War* (life & times of Robert McNamara - 95 mins)

15 November -- *Matewan* (mining dispute in 1920's Virginia - 142 mins)

29 November -- *Sicko* (American healthcare under scrutiny- 120 mins)

Chiswick

Tuesday 17 November 8pm

FUNNY MONEY

Comical currency crank DVD (45 mins)

followed by discussion.

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,

Heathfield Terrace W4

(nearest tube: Chiswick Park).

Glasgow

Wednesday 18 November, 8.30pm

THE ZEITGEIST MOVEMENT

A member of this movement will open up the discussion.

Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road

Manchester

Monday 23 November, 8.30 pm

Discussion on The Case for Socialism

Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

East Anglia

Saturday 14 November, 12 noon to 4pm

Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec Rd,

Norwich NR1 4HY

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The Darwin Centenary



AS THIS month is the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, a book that raised a storm in its day, we are devoting considerable space in this issue to Darwinism and its relation to Marxism, particularly as Marx published the first section of his main work the same year.

Darwinism is an outlook based upon certain fundamental propositions put forward by Charles Darwin, just as Marxism is an outlook based upon certain fundamental propositions put forward by Karl Marx. Books by both of them were published in 1859 which clearly stated their fundamental propositions, and each devoted the rest of his life to accumulating facts in support of the theories that had been put forward. In both instances their theories have been enriched and qualified in certain directions by subsequent investigation, but in neither instance has the accuracy of their fundamental propositions been affected.

Just as Darwin brought order into biological investigation,

so Marx brought order into social investigations. Darwin demonstrated that living forms evolve and Marx demonstrated that social forms evolve.

(...)

In the early years of the Socialist Party of Great Britain the Darwin controversy was still at white heat. We accepted his theory of evolution and had to defend it from the platforms and in our literature. Now the antagonists have fled the field, the evolutionary theory is generally accepted, and the various religious denominations, which used to be its bitterest opponents, are trying their hardest to digest it into their deluding creeds, just as the economists and historians are trying to digest and demoralize Marxism.

(Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, November 1959)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



TV Debates – much ado about nothing

If the general election is to go down in history it will not be through encouraging any prospects for the vital revolutionary, invigoratingly therapeutic society – but for the leaders of the tedious, outworn and discredited parties surprising everyone by agreeing to display their reactionary absurdity in a televised confrontation. That is, supposing the debates ever happen; there is likely to be some time before the election and a mass of obstacles to be negotiated before the leaders' agreement has any meaning. There is, to begin with, the likelihood that the idea sprang from their panic, which convinced them that they had nothing to lose. For Gordon Brown there is the fear that the exposure of New Labour's blundering chaos will lead to their practically disappearing come polling day. David Cameron will be anxious that his gamble on trying to replace his party's Thatcherite reputation as the Nasty Party with one for being Caring Conservatives may not come off in time. And Nick Clegg must be suffering anxiety about the fate of his pose as the real alternative way or running capitalism – with the unasked-for help of Vince Cable – and the effect of any failure on his ambition to make him the new brand of British politics. A crisis on any one of these could fatally undermine the debates.

Rows

Meanwhile it is not only TV soap addicts who wonder why viewing time should be allocated to the debates when there is already face-to-face confrontation in Prime Minister's Questions. Can there, it may be asked, be anything more, anything different, to be said about trying to tame and administer this strife-torn, repressive society? One response might be that anyone devoted to the ructions of *Coronation Street* would find much to divert them in the weekly posturing and screeching in the Commons. But witnessing at first hand the behaviour of our law-makers at their work may be encouraging them to, in more than one sense, switch off. Which would mean the wastage of all the meticulously detailed preparation being poured into the debates – the jockeying and the intrigue, the anguished rows about who will speak when, who will moderate, be in the audience, decide where everyone sits, winds up the discussion... it will be more than just a matter of assuaging some massive egos. Then there will be the analyses, with all parties claiming to have won the debate even if they lost the vote. A lot of this will revolve around the hope, by each participant, for the kind of seminal exchanges in debates between the candidates in previous US Presidential Elections which were widely supposed to have crucially affected the result.

Kennedy vs Nixon

The first example of this was in 1960, when Kennedy ran for the Democrats against Richard Nixon – both of them hardened, ruthless political operators with a suitably determined machine looking after them. In the first of four debates, watched by 80 million people, Nixon took part although he was still recovering after hospital treatment

for an infected knee injury. His appearance – weary, sick and pale – was made worse by his refusal to wear the usual make-up, which drew attention to his facial stubble. He seemed shifty and hesitant so that Kennedy, whose image was rested, fresh and healthy, impressed the millions of voters who preferred leaders who looked like that. The following debates were not so damaging to Nixon and in any case it was doubtful whether his sorry appearance had any crucial effect on the election because Kennedy won by the smallest of margins – 0.1 per cent of the vote – and even at that there was strong evidence of fraud in Texas – where Vice Presidential candidate Lyndon Johnson held sway – and Illinois where Mayor Richard Daley could always get the vote out by hook or by crook. In any case Nixon, stubble and all, eventually bounced back, winning the Presidency in 1968 and then, emphatically, in 1972 until his being sucked down into the Watergate affair exposed how shallow and saleable are what our leaders like to call their morals.

Carter vs Reagan

Another, less startling, example was in the election of 1980 when Ronald Reagan presented as a relaxed and fluent ex-film actor (albeit mainly in B movies) against the anguished born-again christian President Carter. Reagan took to the debates like – well, like any seasoned Hollywood star. The media loved it when he dismissed Carter's attack on his record of voting, as Governor of California,

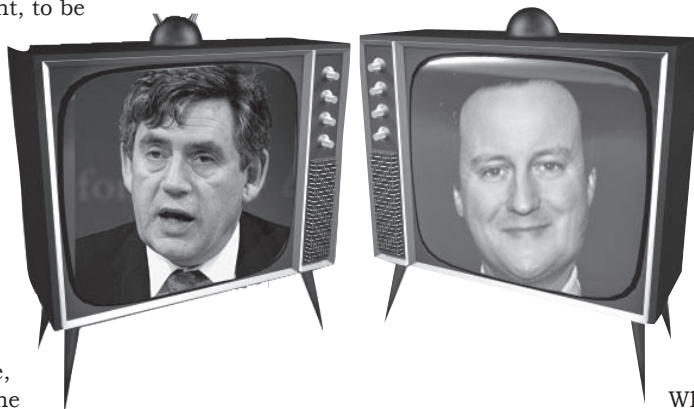
against Medicare and Social Security

benefits, with the contemptuous phrase "There you go again!" Reagan ran away with the election, with nearly 10 per cent more than Carter of the popular vote. This was called the "Reagan Revolution", which ran into the following election and to some extent carried George H.W. Bush into the White House in 1988.

The debates, in America

and here, are intended to promote the idea that leaders are crucially significant and that workers should vote for them and not for what they and their parties represent, in denial of the real experience which points to the leaders' impotence in face of the inexorable demands of capitalism. So when the debates are staged here we cannot look forward to anything more constructive, nor even interesting, than the customary, tedious drone in feeble response to the system's persistent crises. It may be that some wretched participant will try to wriggle out of a particularly difficult question by imitating the Reagan approach – Brown satirising Cameron covering his ineptitude in assumed sincerity; or Cameron raising a laugh with Brown's memories of being brought up as a son of the manse; or both of them savaging Clegg's ambition to be treated as more than a querulous upstart. In doleful times it might get us chuckling, amid our contempt for the exhausted excuses which, even now, are probably being written into the script.

IVAN





Voice from the Back

Too much Month at the end of the Money

When reporting poverty in the world the international media often assume that it is a condition that exists only in Africa or Asia but here is an example of its very real existence in the so-called developed world. "Nearly 60 per cent of Canadians would have trouble paying the bills if their paycheque was delayed by one week, a new poll suggests. The Canadian Payroll Association survey says not only are the majority of Canadians living paycheque-to-paycheque, but they have little ability to put money away for their retirement. The survey, released Monday, said 59 per cent of Canadians would have trouble making ends meet if they missed a paycheque."

(Canadian Press, 14 September)

This paycheque-to-paycheque existence is the norm for most members of the world's working class irrespective of where they live.

Famine and Feast

Capitalism is a social system that produces all sorts of contradictions.

Tremendous technical advances should mean a better society but inside capitalism it leads to better ways to maim, kill and destroy. Improvements in the production of food should lead to a happier world but it produces exactly the opposite. "The number of hungry people will pass 1 billion this year for the first time, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) said, adding that it is facing a serious budget shortfall" (Yahoo News, 16 September). While a million human beings suffer starvation producers of food are destroying it to force up prices. "An emergency meeting over

the collapse in the price of milk will be held by Europe's agriculture ministers. The crisis talks have been convened by Sweden as farmers in mainland Europe continue their 'milk strike', dumping hundreds of thousands of litres of milk on farmland.... In an attempt to end the milk lakes and butter mountains, the European Commission is unwinding its dairy support system" (Times, 24 September). Butter mountains and milk lakes while a billion starve – capitalism has certainly outlived its usefulness.

Up in smoke

Every day in the newspapers and on the TV we are confronted by earnest politicians who assure us that they are doing everything possible to lessen the prospects of another nuclear horror story like Hiroshima or Nagasaki. A great deal of concern is being shown by these politicians as to whether Iran has a nuclear bomb. This concern seems a trifle ludicrous when the USA has 9,400 nuclear warheads and Russia has 13,000 of them. In fact when they are being

frank, as the writer of this newspaper report is, they know that nuclear disarmament is an impossibility

inside capitalism. "Later this month United Nations inspectors will visit Iran's secret nuclear facility near Qom to find out if the Islamic republic is about to become the world's tenth nuclear power. Whatever they find, the world already has enough nuclear weapons to destroy every single nation on the planet. With approximately 23,000 warheads, there is enough deadly material for 2.3 million blasts the size of Hiroshima. ... The world is committed to nuclear

disarmament in principle, in practice it will never happen." (Times, 6 October)

Onward Christian Bankers

Banking, insurance companies and the myriad financial off-shoots that make up the City of London are central to the running of modern capitalism. They produce nothing of course but then neither do the industrial capitalist class. It is probably a bit unfair to say the City produces nothing. It certainly produces nothing useful, but it produces hypocrisy in large doses. "As bankers last month began gearing up for a bumper bonus season, Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury and head of the Anglican church, bemoaned their lack of repentance. "We haven't heard people saying, 'Well, actually, no, we got it wrong and the whole fundamental principle on which we worked was unreal, empty', " Mr Williams told bankers in September. Such rhetoric echoes that of Lord Turner over the summer, when the chairman of the Financial Services Authority spoke in moralistic terms about the need for banking to become 'socially useful' again. Hector Sants, his chief executive, has even explained his move to a regulatory

job in terms of a sense of Christian 'duty' to give something back to society after a 30-year career in money-making." (Financial Times, 7 October) We expect Archbishops to utter hypocritical nonsense, after all it is their stock in trade, but when financiers rant on about "Christian duty" and banking becoming "socially useful"

it is a bit hard to bear. Speed the day when banks and other financial institutes are part of the unlamented history of capitalism along with all its apologists, both religious and secular.



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Free Lunch

by Rigg



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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 5 December** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Copenhagen: another predictable failure

THE MOST recent IPCC's (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) findings say that rich, industrial countries must cut emissions from 1990 levels by 25-40 percent by 2020 if the world is to have a fair chance of avoiding dangerous climate change.

In July the G-8 leaders agreed to limit the global temperature rise to 2 degrees C above the pre-industrial level at which human civilisation developed. Pre-Copenhagen the EU has pledged 20 percent cuts by 2020, but will increase this to 30 percent if others – like the US – do likewise. Japan has pledged 25 percent reductions by 2020 if others will do the same. Chinese president Hu pledged to cut emissions 'by a notable margin' by 2020. The US has given no assurances but a bill Obama has said he supports (the Waxman-Markey bill) would give less than 5 percent reductions by 2020.

Also in July, the findings of a newly completed study by WBGU (a German acronym) – the chairman of which, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, is chief climate adviser to the German government – were given for the first time to an invitation-only conference in the Santa Fe Institute, New Mexico. The study has since been published. This WBGU study says the US must stop all CO₂ emissions by 2020; Germany, Italy and other industrial nations by 2025-30 and China by 2035, with the whole world needing to be carbon-emissions-free by 2050. The study would allow the big polluters to delay

their slowdown by buying emissions rights from developing countries, enabling possible extension times of around a decade for some. A fundamental principle of the study is the 'per capita principle', meaning that the right to emit greenhouse gases is shared equally by all people on Earth. Applied to a world population of seven billion, each person on earth would have a quota of 2.7 tons of CO₂, whereas currently US citizens emit 20 tons per capita.

Schellnhuber claims that meeting these criteria will give humanity a two-in-three chance of staying within that 2 degrees C limit – although there is no guarantee. To increase the odds in favour carbon emissions would have to end sooner; delaying another decade or so before halting all emissions would reduce the odds to fifty-fifty.

Odds are that whatever is promoted at Copenhagen there will be much jockeying and positioning, many fine words and ifs and buts by self-important world leaders and another decade down the ever-more polluted and climate change-affected road we'll look back and see another abject failure – just like Rio, Kyoto, Johannesburg, etc. ad infinitum. What more can we expect from a system which makes a habit of fouling its own and everybody else's backyard as long as it's making money by blind pursuit of growth? Come 2020 the King Canutes of capitalism will still be trying to hold back the waves with empty gestures.



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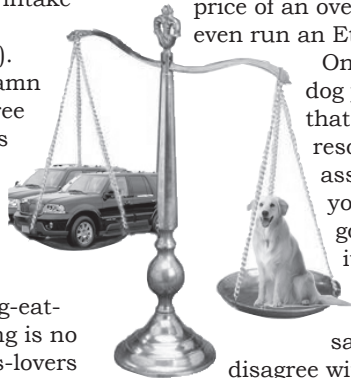
Hail the season of good capitalist cheer which will soon be upon you, while you're on holiday from your lack of job and looking forward to the Christmas repossession and credit collection letters. Since you're not likely to be merry and you can't afford to buy presents or drink, let Pathfinders at least assure you that you can eat crap food because the scientists have got all their calorie intake levels wrong by about 16 per cent ('Rethink for calorie eating levels', *BBC Online*, 14 November).

But please stop feeding the leftovers to the damn dog, who's probably clinically obese. One in three household pets in the UK, about 7m animals, is overweight (http://www.vetpulse.tv/blog/385_pfma-confirms-extent-of-obesity-epidemic-in-british-pets) while in USA it's 50 per cent (<http://www.petobesityprevention.com/facts.htm>).

The fact that pooch has got a paunch in a dog-eat-dog world where 750m people eat nearly nothing is no surprise to socialists, however Fido and Tiddles-lovers

in the top 10 cat and dog-owning countries might be surprised to learn that it takes six and a half times the land area of New Zealand to provide the petfood. And in a delicious knife-twist to any self-righteous organic dog-owning vegan climate-protestors at Copenhagen this month, it turns out that for the eco-pawprint of an average sized dog you could instead drive not one but two SUVs 10,000 kilometres over a year (*New Scientist*, 24 October and *Guardian*, 13 November). In fact, for the price of an overweight small Scottie dog you could even run an Ethiopian or a Vietnamese human.

Once you've eaten the dogfood and the dog you can always resort to drugs, now that the debate has been satisfactorily resolved and we can reliably tell how to assess the relative safety of any drug. Oh, you didn't know? Well it's simple. If the government says nothing at all about it, it will most probably kill you, whereas if they swear blind it's dangerous and what's more do their Nutt and sack any scientific advisor who dares to disagree with them, you know you can party!



Crystal balls-ups

No doubt many readers have come to regard Pathfinders as their infallible technical and scientific guru, and one is of course reluctant to disabuse them of such notions, however in positively the last anniversary item of 2009 it might be fun to reflect on the fate of pundit predictions from 20 years ago. The following comes from the book *Towards 2001 – A consumer's guide to the 21st century*, by Malcolm Abrams and Harriet Bernstein (Angus, London, 1989). Quite what qualified these two journalists to write this book is unclear, however they probably did about as well as Pathfinders would have done.

- Correct (if late): Flat screens, pocket computer, CDRs, digital cameras and hearing aids, impotence pills, sat-nav, supermarket self-checkout.
- Wrong (or not heard of): walking TV, self-weeding gardens, bark-stopper dog collar, flying car, potato ice-cream.
- Not predicted (stand by for a shock): pen-drives, DVDs, small mobile phones, text messaging, World Wide Web, PDAs, lithium-ion batteries (making small portable electronics possible).

What do we learn from this? Not much, apart from never believe what gurus tell you. The list of things they signally failed to predict accords eerily with the most revolutionary changes in our culture, which is a kind of reverse trick-shot. Hope for socialists, perhaps, since people are always telling us socialism will never happen. But Pathfinders can hardly stand by and laugh without entering the fray, so here are a few modest offerings for the next ten years:

They won't find a graviton or a Higgs boson; they won't understand what they *do* get; the LHC will break down anyway because somebody sneezed; somebody will announce the overthrow of Einstein (again); most of the heat from the Caderache nuclear fusion plant will be generated by rows over money; Dawkins will get baptised a Catholic.

Things that go Plod in the night

Modern detective work is a serious and scientific business, apparently. Only not in Wales, whose police force embarked on a £20,000 investigation into a suicide after being told that the man's ghost had visited psychics and told them he had been poisoned (*Guardian*, 7 November). Learning that the words 'lion', 'horse' and 'fox' were significant, the cosmic coppers set off to visit every pub with one of those names in its title, and one with a statue of a horse outside. The case was closed only after a second post-mortem revealed no trace of any poison. "We are a laughing stock," complained one police source. True, but no doubt enquiries in these pubs resulted in various spirits being apprehended as a consolation.

Competition results

If you interrogate your 140 character memory you will recall that Pathfinders attempted, back in September, to raise the level of debate on Twitter by holding a competition to find the best SMS-length rendition of the socialist case. To say that there was a tsunami of enthusiastic responses might be a slight exaggeration (ask a socialist whatever you like, but don't ask them to be brief) however some notable entries deserve honourable mention (the prize is that we keep your name out of it).

- Most rallying: Society marches on its belly; give us the land, farms and the bakery not the crumbs! 4 1 world socialist community! (FA)
- Most exact: From each according to ability, to each according to need. Free labour, free access. That's Socialism. (SJW)

- Most poetic: The essence of capitalism is the stench of cordite and blood.
The essence of communism is the flavour of fulfilment. (JN)
- Most McGonagall: The essence of capitalism is wages and profit.
The essence of socialism is how to get off it. (ALB)
- Most conversational: Think outside the box of capitalism and make the world a pleasurable place to inhabit. Work for the benefit of society, not your masters. (JV)
- Most economical: I vote to end capitalism X (PM)
- Most toddler-friendly: world socialism - for a world without war, want, wages and the Fat Controller.
- Most street-hip: Banish the gods from the sky, the capitalists from the earth and the chuggers from the high street. (DON)

Thanks to all those who contributed. Due to postal difficulties the prize Seychelles tickets regrettably cannot be mailed out. Pathfinders will return in January. With a tan.



Eric Fromm on modern life

“CAPITALISTIC SOCIETY is based on the principle of political freedom on the one hand, and of the market as the regulator of all economic, hence social, relations, on the other. The commodity market determines the conditions under which commodities are exchanged, the labour market regulates the acquisition and sale of labour. Both useful things and useful energy and skill are transformed into commodities which are exchanged without the use of force and without fraud under the conditions of the market.”

“Modern capitalism needs men who cooperate smoothly and in large numbers; who want to consume more and more; and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated. It needs men who feel free and independent, not subject to any authority or principle or conscience—yet willing to be commanded, to do what is expected of them, to fit into the social machine without friction; who can be guided without force, led without leaders, prompted without aim—except the one to make good, to be on the move, to function, to go ahead.

What is the outcome? Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions. Human relations are essentially those of alienated automatons, each basing his security on staying close to the herd, and not being different in thought, feeling or action.”

“Man becomes a ‘nine to fiver,’ he is part of the labour force, or the bureaucratic force of clerks and managers. He has little initiative, his tasks are prescribed by the organization of the work; there is even little difference between those high up on the ladder and those on the bottom. They all perform tasks prescribed by the whole structure of the organization, at a prescribed speed, and in a prescribed manner. Even the feelings are prescribed: cheerfulness, tolerance, reliability, ambition, and an ability to get along with everybody without friction.”

“From birth to death, from Monday to Monday, from morning to evening – all activities are reutilised and prefabricated. How should a man caught in this net of routine not forget that he is a man, a unique individual, one who is given only this one chance of living, with hopes and disappointments, with sorrow and fear, with the long for love and the dread of the nothing and of separateness?”

“In the modern work process of a clerk, the worker on the endless belt, little is left of this uniting quality of work. The worker becomes an appendix to the machine or to the bureaucratic organization.”
(from *The Art of Loving*, 1956)

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The advance of capitalism

THE ADVANCE of capitalism throughout Europe proved to be a disaster to all the old institutions of feudalism. The feudal landlord was displaced by a capitalist one. The once all-powerful land owners were now to be rivalled for power by the merchants and industrialists of modern capitalism. In a series of epoch making changes in Britain we had the Enclosure Acts and the Highland Clearances. In many places centuries old villages were replaced by sheep enclosures as agricultural labourers were forced into the growing towns and cities of capitalism to seek a pitiful existence. It's what Marx described in *Capital* in 1867 as the "so-called primitive accumulation". As he so aptly put it: "The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process." It is still going on in parts of the world.

Primitive accumulation

A recent Channel 4 programme entitled *Unreported World, Peru: Blood and Oil* depicted the bloodshed and military violence that has accompanied the Peruvian government's decision to auction off large parts of the Amazon countryside that has been used for thousands of years by the indigenous people. "For the first time isolated indigenous groups are uniting to fight the government's plans to auction off 75% of the Amazon - which accounts for nearly two thirds of the country's territory - to oil, gas and mining companies. ... These would allow companies to bypass indigenous communities to obtain permits for exploration and extraction of natural resources, logging and the building of hydroelectric dams." (*Times*, 9 October).

In another part of the Amazon region capitalism's lust for profit was carried to an even more awful extreme - the complete destruction of the Akuntsu people. A once proud group of several hundred now have only five survivors. "Much of the Akuntsus' story is - for obvious reasons - undocumented. For millennia, they lived in obscurity, deep in the rainforest of Rondonia state, a remote region of western Brazil near the Bolivian border. They hunted wild pig, agoutis and tapir, and had small gardens in their villages, where they would grow manioc (or cassava) and corn. Then, in the 1980s, their death warrant was effectively signed: farmers and loggers were invited to begin exploring the region, cutting roads deep into the forest, and turning the once verdant wilderness into lucrative soya fields and cattle

ranches. ... The only way to prevent the government finding out about this indigenous community was to wipe them off the map. At some point, believed to be around 1990, scores of Akuntsu were massacred at a site roughly five hours' drive from the town of Vilhena. Only seven members of the tribe escaped, retreating deeper into the wilderness to survive." (*Independent*, 13 October)

Ruthless system

The recent speed-up of the development of capitalism inside China has also led to even more misery for the working population of that part of the world. In an effort to compete with more established industrial nations the Chinese owning class have ruthlessly swept aside small peasant-like production for the mass production of modern capitalism. The resultant displacing of labourers and the mammoth increase in water and air pollution has led to a near catastrophe of unimaginable proportions

The World Bank recently estimated that China has experienced an annual industrial growth of 10 percent over the last 25 years, and reckoned the number of deaths from pollution alone in 2007 as 760,000. To grasp an inkling of this social disaster it is probably better to look at two local horror stories than quote mere statistics.

"The residents of Shuangqiao village say that their homes are now nothing but places in which to wait for death. In the paddy fields surrounding this small community in Hunan province, southern China, the rice is neglected and strewn with weeds. The vegetable plots stand empty, stripped of the green beans and cabbages that were grown as cash crops. Underfoot, the earth has been poisoned to a depth of 20cm (8in). The water in the wells is undrinkable. Tragedies like this - the legacy of China's rush to get rich - are all too common. Yesterday more than 600 children in Shaanxi province were found to be suffering from lead poisoning caused by a nearby lead and zinc smelter. The plight of Shuangqiao, however where three people have died and 509 are sick from poisoning by the heavy metals cadmium and indium, produced by a nearby factory, has drawn wide-spread attention since residents took to the internet to air their grievances." (*Times*, 15 August)

What lies behind this seemingly callous action by the owning class on their own national working population? It cannot be mere coincidence that the price of indium soared from \$600 (£360) a kilogram in 2003 to \$1,000 by 2006. China now meets 30 per cent of world demand and at its peak the Xianghe factory produced 300 kg of indium a month. Capitalism is an insatiable monster as far as profits are concerned. Human misery is of no concern where the profit motive reigns supreme.

One farmer's plight summed up the hopelessness of the situation when he was told by

officials that his land would be unusable for 60 years but that he could grow non-edible crops such as cotton or trees to clean the soil. "Farmer Yang has abandoned hope, "It's the children, the children," he lamented. "We want our children to have a future. We have to leave."

RD



IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



JUST CHECKING OUT THE 'PERSONAL' COLUMN HERE.



CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE HOW VIRTUALLY EVERY ADVERT STIPULATES 'PROFESSIONAL'. YOU KNOW, 'I'M PROFESSIONAL, WLTM PROFESSIONAL', ETC. WHY DON'T THEY JUST HAVE DONE WITH IT AND SAY 'WOULDN'T TOUCH WORKING CLASS WITH A BARSEPOLE' ...



RACE, SEX, SEXUALITY, RELIGION ... THE BAD OLD PREJUDICES EVERY INTELLIGENT PERSON HAS LEFT BEHIND, THANKFULLY. BUT CLASS PREJUDICE IS EVIDENTLY STILL RESPECTABLE ... EVEN AMONG THE IMPECCABLY ENLIGHTENED READERS OF THIS PERIODICAL.



OF COURSE, 'CLASS' IS A DIRTY WORD. IT'S NOT EVEN SUPPOSED TO EXIST ANYMORE. WHERE IS YOUR CLASSIC URBAN PROLETARIAT? YOUR 'HORN'Y HANDED SONS OF TOIL' AS PETER MANDELSON SARCASTICALLY PUT IT.

THE BOURGEOISIE STILL NEEDS LABOUR, TO TOIL AWAY PRODUCING ALL THOSE MANUFACTURED GOODS IT COVETS. 'MANUFACTURING DOESN'T MATTER?' OF COURSE IT DOES. MORE THAN EVER. WE'RE SURROUNDED BY STUFF! IT ALL HAS TO BE MADE!...



... IT JUST ISN'T MADE IN THIS COUNTRY ANYMORE, THAT'S ALL. THE CHINESE PROLETARIAT COMES FAR CHEAPER. AND WITHOUT ANY THOSE UNIONS, OR HEALTH AND SAFETY RED TAPE.



THE FACT IS, THE RULING CLASS SIMPLY DON'T NEED THE PROLES IN THIS COUNTRY ANYMORE. THERE'S A LIMITLESS SUPPLY OF CHEAP LABOUR OUT THERE IN A POVERTY STRICKEN DEREGULATED GLOBAL ECONOMY. AND THOSE DESPERATE ECONOMIC MIGRANTS, STRUGGLING TO GET INTO BRITAIN, PROVIDE A SCAPEGOAT, A CONVENIENT DIVERSION FROM THE REAL INEQUITIES OF THE SYSTEM. THEY ALSO PROVIDE A NEW SERVANT CLASS ... NANNIES, CLEANERS, MAIDS ... SO HARDWORKING! SO CHEAP!...

... AND ILLEGAL, SO THEY CAN'T EVER COMPLAIN.



SO THERE'S JUST NO RAISON D'ÊTRE FOR THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS. THATCHER'S DIVIDE AND CONQUER PLAN WAS DESIGNED TO ENTICE THE UPPER SECTION OF THE WORKING CLASS TO BECOME RESPECTABLE MIDDLE CLASS HOMEOWNERS, WITH A STAKE, AN INTEREST IN, THE MARKET.



AND THE LOWER WORKING CLASS? GRIND 'EM DOWN! CREATE AN UNDERCLASS. THE JEREMY KYLE SHOW IS THE MODERN EQUIVALENT OF THE PILLORY, BEDLAM ... SEE THESE FECKLESS IDLE TYPES LIVING THEIR DISMAL WASTED LIVES AND FEEL SMUG ... IT'S THEIR FAULT, NOT SOCIETY'S. NOT ME AND YOU.

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR WORK?



IS WORK LOOKING FOR US?...



CAPITALIST PARADOX

"Scientists and development experts across the globe are racing to increase food production by 50 percent over the next two decades to feed the world's growing population, yet many doubt their chances despite a broad consensus that enough land, water and expertise exist. The number of hungry people in the world rose to 1.02 billion this year, or nearly one in seven people, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, despite a 12-year concentrated effort to cut the number. The global financial recession added at least 100 million people by depriving them of the means to buy enough food, but the numbers were inching up even before the crisis, the United Nations noted in a report last week. "The way we manage the global agriculture and food security system doesn't work," said Kostas G. Stamoulis, a senior economist at the organization. "There is this paradox of increasing global food production, even in developing countries, yet there is hunger." (New York Times, 22 October)

ALL RIGHT FOR SOME

"As workers up and down the UK sat at home last week worrying about whether they would still have a job in a month's time, a raucous crowd of hedge fund managers and investment bankers at the Whisky Mist nightclub in Mayfair pulled yet more vodka out of their huge ice bucket and called for the waiter to bring another bottle of Dom Perignon, served with a sparkler. ...In London nightspots last week, the City's finest were spending with a swagger. ...As City workers once again prepare for corporate excess, and investment banks such as Goldman Sachs get ready to pay record bonuses, new bars, restaurants and nightclubs are springing up around the office tower blocks in the City and Canary Wharf to feed demand." (Observer, 1 November)

DRUG PUSHERS PAY OFF

"Could you imagine how much money you would have to have to be able to spend \$609,000 a day? What would you expect to receive for that amount of money? Who has that kind of money to spend, especially during a "recession"? According to the latest issue of Time magazine, in the first 6 months of this year, the pharmaceutical industry spent about \$609,000 a day to influence lawmakers. Can you imagine the financial payoff they must expect to get to be able to spend that kind of money. This does not include all the money they spend on advertising as well. The drug industry has 1,228 registered lobbyists. This equals 2.3 lobbyists for every member of congress. Obviously, the pharmaceutical industry does not want to be left out of the current healthcare reform debate and are willing to pay handsomely to make sure they aren't. The return on that investment has already been considerable. As drug lobbyist Jim Greenwood says, "we've done very well." (Dr Brian's Blog, 26 October)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 5th. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email:julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

South London branch. 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

West London branch. 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail: 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

NORTHWEST

Lancaster branch. Meets every Monday 8.00pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380
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South West branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

Redruth. Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

EAST ANGLIA

East Anglia branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

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NORTHERN IRELAND

Newtownabbey. Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

Ayrshire. D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freeuk.com

Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

Cardiff and District. John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

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This year's Nobel Prize for Economics

Every year the Bank of Sweden awards a prize to some economist, often called the Nobel Prize for Economics even though it wasn't established by the old merchant of death himself. It has in fact only been going since 1968. Usually the prize goes to some obscure economist for work on some obscure aspect of the market economy. Sometimes it goes to a big name such as the Keynesian Paul Samuelson (1970) or the Monetarist Milton Friedman (1976). Even the mad marketeer Baron von Hayek got one, in 1974.

Very occasionally it goes to someone who has done some interesting work, as when in 1998 it went to Amartya Sen who had shown that famines were caused by a collapse in legal access to food (via money or direct production) and not by any actual shortage of food or overpopulation. This year, too, it has gone to someone whose work sounds interesting – Elinor Ostrom whose 1990 book *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* refuted the so-called “Tragedy of the Commons” parable that is often used to try to show that socialism wouldn't work.

In 1968 an American biologist Garrett Hardin conceived of a parable to explain why, in his view, common ownership was no solution to the environmental crisis and why in fact it would only make matters worse. Called “The Tragedy of the Commons”, his parable went like this: assume a pasture to which all herdsmen have free access to graze their cattle; in these circumstances each herdsman would try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons and, in the end, its carrying capacity would be exceeded, resulting in environmental degradation.

Hardin's parable was completely unhistorical. Wherever commons have existed there also existed rules governing their use, sometimes in the form of traditions, sometimes in the form of arrangements for decision-making in common, which precluded such overgrazing and other threats to the long-term sustainability of the system.

One of the conclusions that governments drew from Hardin's armchair theorising was that in existing cases where producers had rights of access to a “common-pool resource” the solution was either to privatise the resource or to subject the producers to outside control via quotas, fines and other restrictions. Ostrom took the trouble to study various common property arrangements some of which had lasted for centuries, including grazing pastures in Switzerland, forests in Japan, and irrigation systems in Spain and the Philippines.

According to *The Times* (13 October),

“Based on numerous studies of user-managed fish stocks, pastures, woods, lakes and groundwater basins, she asserts that resource users frequently develop sophisticated mechanisms for decision-making and rule enforcement to handle conflicts of interest”.

In other words, common ownership did not necessarily have to lead to resource depletion as predicted by Hardin and trumpeted by opponents of socialism. The cases Ostrom examined were not socialism as the common owners were private producers. In socialism the producers, the immediate users of the common resources, would not be trying to make an independent living for themselves but would be carrying out a particular function on behalf of the community in a social context where the aim of production would be to satisfy needs on a sustainable basis. But the rules they would draw up for the use of the grazing land, forests, fishing grounds and the like would be similar to those in the cases she studied.



In the wake of the horrific events of the day, his captain is cool. He walks up to Massey and asks; “Are you doing all right, Staff Sergeant?” Massey responds: “No, sir. I am not doing O.K. Today was a bad day. We killed a lot of innocent civilians.”

Fully aware of the civilian carnage, his captain asserts: “No, today was a good day.” Relatives wailing, cars destroyed, blood all over the ground, Marines celebrating, civilians dead, and “it was good day”!:

<http://tinyurl.com/58j2ag>

Even as the financial system collapsed last year, and millions of investors lost billions of dollars, one unlikely investor was racking up historic profits: John Paulson, a hedge-fund manager in New York. His firm made \$20 billion between 2007 and early 2009 by betting against the housing market and big financial companies. Mr. Paulson's personal cut would amount to nearly \$4 billion, or more than \$10 million a day. That was more than the 2007 earnings of J.K. Rowling, Oprah Winfrey and Tiger Woods combined:

<http://tinyurl.com/yicsbwm2>

Sixteen workers are killed a day in the United States because of reckless negligence on the part of their employers. Under existing laws, these employers get a slap on the wrist, or walk away scot-free. Meanwhile, workers who blow the whistle face threats and retaliation at the workplace:

<http://tinyurl.com/yath3mq>

Its ruler re-named the days of the week after himself and his mother. Opera, ballet and the circus are banned. To get a driving licence, citizens must sit an exam on the dead leader's autobiography. Welcome to Turkmenistan:

<http://tinyurl.com/yhxf6ev>

When veterans die -- from lack of health insurance More than 1.5 million vets don't have it, and 2,200 vets die every year because of it :

<http://tinyurl.com/yebo3fg>

“..We suggest that it will be pretty much like this in socialist society. Although it will be global as opposed to tribal, people will still live in small localised communities..” But some people I imagine will choose a clean, green high-rise city lifestyle instead:

<http://tinyurl.com/y1rgg6l>

Why are so many Americans now toying with socialism, in a country that created the most successful free market economic system in history and spent half of the last century fighting the heresy of Marx's socialism?

<http://tinyurl.com/yfp76hd>

“Americans are saying that with their planes they can see an egg 18 kilometers away, so why can't they see the Taliban?” ABDULLAH WASAY, an Afghan pharmacist:

<http://tinyurl.com/yc46rq8>



Down and out in Mayfair

We still live in a society that if you don't have the ability to pay you 'goes' without.

Paying fuel bills can be hard at the best of times but you are twice as likely to fall into fuel poverty if you've recently been treated for cancer, according to new research from Macmillan Cancer Support. Following diagnosis, three-quarters of cancer patients in active treatment need to use their heating more, yet those under 60 do not qualify for any help to pay for it. Fuel poverty – having to spend more than 10 percent of your income on heating – is a relatively new phenomenon that is beginning to grip Britain faster than the spread of swine flu and serves as the cold reminder that we still live in a society that if you don't have the ability to pay you go without.

The true extent of such hardship and poverty in Britain and its impact is conveniently bypassed and generally ignored by mainstream politicians who have more to peevishly whinge about when it comes to their own expenses. As we come to almost the end of this the first decade of the 21st century it's as if the hands on the clock of time have been turned backwards. If it wasn't for the constant sight of all manner of technology's advancement from transport to the smallest iPods, cyberspace and the internet you would not be wrong to conclude that some

things change but much, very much just stays the same, as I'm constantly reminded when I visit and spend time with my many friends who live their lives out and on the streets of London, the capital city in this the fifth richest nation in the world.

Homeless

The people that I speak of are the visible homeless that no one seems to see. Their numbers are hard to place a finger on, they live in hostels, squats and a growing number sleep rough on our streets. Keeping warm in winter is a battle waged every year by the rough sleeper in his or her skip, but truth is every season brings its problems when you're forced to share the outdoor life with the birds, urban foxes and city rats.

A great many of my friends on the street live and rely solely upon street handouts and day centres for food, laundry and bathing facilities. Many refuse to claim entitled benefits, preferring not to be a part of a welfare system that incessantly strong-arms the unemployed into taking low paid employment with the use of sanctions and penalties. This is in complete contrast to what Richard Bacon, a Tory MP on the committee which acts

as a watchdog over public spending, said:

"The Department for Work and Pensions does not know how many people are out of work by choice, rather than by chance. Properly targeted help must be put in place for those who want to work. Only then will the Government be able to flush out the shirkers who are sticking up two fingers at hard-working families and treating the benefit system like a cash machine." (www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-512754/Britains-benefits-generation-State-handouts-way-life-million.html)

How can anyone not be moved by the spectacle and lines of men and women who gather every night in London's Lincoln Inn Fields for a meal provided by the

Hari Khrisnas or a Jamaican Christian Church. On some occasions I've counted up to three hundred people who arrive hours in advance with all their worldly possessions rammed in to rucksacks and carrier bags, sleeping bags and

their wind-up radio. This is no easy life. The streets are fraught with danger for many homeless people; over the last few years people living on the streets have become more vulnerable to violence and attack; this threat can be from other street users and from those who are intoxicated through alcohol and/or drugs.

Rough sleepers are 13 times more likely to experience crime and 47 times likely to be the victim of theft. Crime, and the perception of crime, can play a major role in the decisions of rough sleepers in not only where they sleep but also where they take part in daytime activities. Many rough sleepers avoid danger and stay clear of violence by using the London night bus service to get some rest, as one friend told me: "You take the longest route say to Heathrow Airport and back that kills 4 hours and before you know it it's morning." Female rough sleepers are particularly vulnerable to physical attack and abuse, and to protect themselves they tend to be amongst the most hidden.

Rough sleepers are met with a mixture of emotions from the general public ranging from pity and support to anger and distrust. But one thing almost goes unasked and that's why are people, fellow human beings living, existing on our rich streets; streets that are not paved with gold.

London has seen a big increase in the number of migrant workers left homeless and destitute in the city, without access to benefits or housing help. The effects of the economic downturn, as well as a legal block preventing migrants from certain countries claiming benefits, has meant increased numbers of rough sleepers in the city from eastern European countries.

Every year an official head count of rough sleepers within Westminster is carried out and recorded for official purposes. In recent years allegations of tactics designed to reduce the figure have been made. The Simon Community, an organisation that works and lives with the homeless on the streets, undertook its

own street head count at the end of October, and found 247 people sleeping rough in the City of Westminster, almost 100 more than official figures now state. The Simon Community along with some rough sleepers have claimed that diversionary tactics were put in place days before the street count took place. A number of known rough sleepers were offered travel warrants by Police and community officers, in an attempt to transfer them out of the area. In a BBC report on the issue of travel warrants being handed out, the Metropolitan Police denied the allegation that they were shifting people out of the area, saying that they regularly issue travel warrants for homeless people, particularly during the winter

months. Allegations have also been made that local authorities exerted harsh measures against homeless people, according to the Simon Community. They received information

about a group of homeless people being physically moved out of the Victoria Street area by Police. Similarly, there are accusations of doorways used to bed down in were hosed by cleaners to make them unusable.

There are claims that charities were also instructed to make beds available in their hostels ahead of the count, and emergency accommodation was opened up on the week the count took place.

Reality entertainment

During the summer the BBC screened a very different type of reality television; this involved celebrities who were asked to partake in the programme 'Famous, Rich & Homeless'. This TV documentary, described as thought-provoking, recruited five famous volunteers who were asked to experience the life of a homeless person on the streets of London for a few days (ten) during the winter of 2008. When I say famous, what I mean by that is household names drawn from the entertainment and media industry. The Marquess of Blandford, the *One Show's* Hardeep Singh Kohli, journalist Rosie Boycott, former Coronation Street actor Bruce Jones

and tennis commentator Annabel Croft all swapped their lavish privileged lifestyles, their fame and fortune for a time; for a world of soup runs and hostels.

They were helped and manoeuvred throughout by *Big Issue* founder John A Bird and Craig Last, a former youth worker for the charity Centrepoin. Having watched the show myself, I came away thinking that this type of reality entertainment achieves nothing more than accepting and approving that the daily struggle for life's existence at the bottom of the pile is a normal part of the structure of society. But the best response to the show came from a homeless person writing in the letters page of *Pavement*, the free monthly magazine produced for London's homeless. They said:

"I found it quite ironic that 'Famous, Rich and

"properties serve as investments for owners who pay the bills to keep them empty"



New figures show there was a 15% rise in the overall number of rough sleepers in London in the last year - and the equivalent of five new rough sleepers on London's streets every day (www.mungos.org)

Homeless' was shown on the BBC. I spent seven months living rough on London's streets, often at All Souls' Church in Portland Place. Having crashed there for several months, rough sleeping with the full knowledge and permission of the church authorities, I was woken one night and "moved on" by a couple of Westminster police officers. When I enquired about the incident at the church reception the following morning, I was informed by a staffer that the alleged complaint had not been lodged by the church authorities but by BBC security staff at Broadcasting House, directly across the road, no doubt because they were irritated by having to constantly step over cardboard boxes whilst filming fearless, hard-hitting documentaries about the plight of London's homeless."

Empty homes

About the same time as these programmes were broadcast, *The Wall Street Journal* (15 July) reported that in the London Borough of Westminster, where Mayfair is located, homes can cost up to £50 million. Yet Westminster is fifth among London's 33 boroughs in the number of unoccupied properties. In 2008, 1,737 homes had been vacant for six months or more, the third highest number among all London boroughs, according to the Empty Homes Agency, a non-profit group that seeks to put empty homes back into use.

Westminster Council have placed according to its website (at the time of writing) 3,000 homeless families into temporary accommodation. Many have been exported to the poorer boroughs of East London because they claim there are not enough temporary in Westminster.

The high concentration of rundown, empty homes is striking for a posh Mayfair, with its ornately gated manses. The hub of aristocratic society before World War II, Mayfair's modern-day image is demonstrated by its prominent place on the British Monopoly board.

Mayfair's homeowners aren't down on their luck, far from it. Rather, their properties serve as investments for owners who pay the bills to keep them empty – something the neighbours and council object to when the homes fall into disrepair. Many owners decline to rent the homes due to local council tax rules, with tax on properties at a lower rate if they are empty and unfurnished, which is a loophole that helps the filthy rich. As the number of homes



A female rough sleeper - "particularly vulnerable to physical attack and abuse"



London mayor Boris Johnson examines the housing problem

now priced at more than £1m has fallen by a third during the past two years the problems surrounding the abandonment of posh homes may get worse.

The whole business of empty homes came to light last winter when a group of young squatters occupied

two £20 million homes on Park Lane overlooking Hyde Park. Before the squatters settled in, the homes had been empty for seven years. During that time, the Council had tried three times to contact their British Virgin Islands-based property owners: Red Line Ltd. and Perfectil Ltd. Following two years of silence, the property owners surfaced once newspaper reports outed the squatters. The result of such media reports has meant that wealthy homeowners have turned to private security firms to protect their empty London properties from squatters at a cost of up to £2,600 a week while according to the Empty Homes Agency there are more than 80,000 empty properties in London (*Evening Standard*, 11 November). In the recession this is one business that may prove to be very lucrative as a growing number of homes are bought by foreign investors who want a secure asset but continue to live elsewhere.

In our daily press we read much about the housing problem, about lost homes reposessed by the banks and the so-called housing shortage, with thousands stranded and languishing for years on the council housing waiting list or simply held hostage to the private landlord, the cry goes out for more affordable homes or a proposed programme of public works that embraces house building as the desired solution, peddled by those who still offer the dried-out old fig leaf of failed reform. Over a hundred years ago Frederick Engels wrote in the *Housing Question*: "This shortage is not something peculiar to the present; it is not even one of the sufferings peculiar to the modern proletariat in contradistinction to all earlier oppressed classes. On the contrary, all oppressed classes in all periods suffered more or less uniformly from it."

And then Engels gave an answer to this age old problem. He said, and I repeat, to end the housing shortage there is only one means: to abolish altogether the exploitation and oppression of the working class by the ruling class.

NL

Late January 2010 Standard

Because of the Christmas and New Year holiday, the *Socialist Standard* for January, 2010, will be later than usual.

Capitalism and food security – an oxymoron

Food security for all the people of the world will only be possible when the profit motive is taken out of food supply.

It's official! Now more than one billion people are hungry and in desperate need of food aid according to the World Food Programme. To meet this need \$6.7 billion will be required this year alone (of which less than half has been raised so far). \$6.7 billion equates to less than 0.01 percent of that heaped on the needy banks and corporations during the recent and ongoing financial crisis. But help is at hand, at least for Africa's hungry millions, in the form of a New Green Revolution courtesy of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Or is it? According to Raj Patel, Eric Holt-Gimenez and Annie Shattuck in 'Ending Africa's Hunger' (*The Nation*, September 21), "the conventional wisdom is wrong. Food output per person is as high as it has ever been, suggesting that hunger isn't a problem of production so much as one of distribution." A leaked internal strategy document from the Gates Foundation stated, "over time this (strategy) will require some degree of mobility and a lower percentage of total employment involved in direct agricultural production." The foundation claims that peasants will head for the cities "because there are a lot of them who don't want to be farmers" and "people make their own choices." The translation from Newspeak reads like this: agribusiness will expand and drive more peasant farmers from the land, disenfranchising them and forcing them to seek employment elsewhere for economic reasons.

Outlining proposals which are largely in opposition to the development strategies of the Gates foundation is the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) whose 2500 page report was completed after 400 scientists spent four years researching the subject. They concluded that the present system of food production and the way food is traded round the world has led to a highly unequal distribution of benefits and serious adverse ecological effects and was now contributing to climate change. Science and technology should be targeted towards raising yields but also protecting soils, waters and

forests. Robert Watson, director of the IAASTD and chief scientist at the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said, "Business as usual will hurt the poor. It will not work." More of their conclusions found that there was little role for GM foods as it is practised now, that the

short answer to whether transgenic crops can feed the world is no and that the global rush to biofuels was

not sustainable. One response to this report from a group of eight international environmental and consumer groups was, "this is a sobering account of the failure of industrial farming. Small-scale farmers and ecological methods provide the way forward to avert the current food crisis and meet the needs of communities."

Some of the negative aspects and results of current farming practices widely available in the public domain and cited in this international group's response include bio-energy, bio-technology, climate change and trade and markets. One argument could be that some uses of bio-energy and some applications of bio-technology may be useful, however trade and markets only take into consideration profit and, therefore, climate change will continue unabated.

The big question is how to move from a model in which everyone recognises the profit imperative whether they love it or hate it; profit on a large scale or small, profit from agribusiness or market stall, from pure accumulation to simple survival, from the greedy to the needy, profit which favours minority over majority in all areas. Everyone recognises it but far fewer question the possibility, the sense, the imperative of implementing a different model, not a few reforms here and there to give temporary help to this sector or that, but one which takes into consideration the needs, aspirations, ideas and ideals of the many rather than the few.

Who produces the food anyway? Farmers do. And what are farmers saying about their position, as middlemen between consumers and profiteers? La Via Campesina is a "peasants' international" movement, politically pluralist and non-aligned, in 56 countries across 5 continents which came about in response to the global offensive against the countryside. Farmers from North and South united to confront agribusiness whose industrialisation removed the link of consumer to farmer. More

than simply trying to defend their economic interests they advocate the right of people to define their own agricultural and food policy. Their list of demands includes safe, nutritious food in sufficient quantity for all, opposition to WTO, World Bank and IMF policies, opposition to displacement and urbanisation of small farmers and guaranteed input into formulating agricultural policies.

Farmers around the world tell of plummeting incomes and higher overheads in both rich and poor world, of farm closures, bankruptcies and suicides whilst financial pages boast of bigger and better profits for the industrial agricultural corporations. Farmers seek a solution which allows them to continue farming with input and policies emanating from them, the producers, not to the dictates of large corporations. This aim is understandable but, generally what they demand is increased subsidies or a watering-down of aggressive policies and trade deals,

a redressing of their situation into one which is more economically viable and favourable to them.

Who does the consuming and what are they saying? Dave Murphy, founder of Food Democracy Now! speaks for many when he writes that "people are realising over the last 60 years that the ownership of our food supply

has been consolidated into the hands of a few powerful multinational corporations," that "the abundance of 'cheap' food comes at a high cost to society, to individual rights and to our collective future. The industrialisation of food in America has had fundamental health, environmental and economic consequences that can no longer be ignored. By placing a high value on cheap food Americans have unwittingly allowed corporate agribusiness to outsource the true cost of production onto society. The result has been the pollution of our nation's rivers and streams, damage to citizens' health and a severe breakdown in our nation's rural communities where small farmers have been pushed off the land."

Food production should be about meeting the self-defined needs of people, not a profit-motivated venture for corporations, agribusinesses and their boards and shareholders. Food security is about meeting the dietary needs of all people, at all times, enabling them to live a healthy life and not to be constantly in fear of the vagaries of the market. Only by addressing the monetary element, by coming to terms with the absolute necessity of removing it and any profit motive from the food supply will farmers, consumers and all the peoples of the world have the security of knowing that sufficient food is available to all, at all times and in all situations. Food security for all the world's citizens is just not possible in a capitalist system. Prove me otherwise.

JANET SURMAN



HOW I GOT TO BE A SOCIALIST

"... I came to know about 'mine' and 'thine' but always preferred 'our'."

AT THE age of 5 I had never heard the word "socialist", but something happened on my first day at school that suggested I was one. My mother sent me off with a packed lunch. "How was your lunch?" she asked. "I liked the sandwich but I have the banana to Greta." "Why on earth did you do that? It was *your* banana." Puzzled, I said that she had asked for it, so her need must have been greater than mine. After that episode I came to know about 'mine' and 'thine', but always preferred 'our'.

I first met the Socialist Party at its platform at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park. The socialist message was powerful stuff, erudite but put across in a controversial way. It was 1945, the year the war ended and Labour won the election. It did so on a programme of reforms, and because of a widespread feeling that it was time for a change, of administration but not of the system.

I remember questioning a Labour candidate at the 1950 election about his attitude to socialism. Anticipating Sir Humphrey waffle by a couple of decades, the candidate said something like: "Socialism? Yes, in the fullness of time, when conditions are ripe, at the appropriate moment, all things considered—but first we must elect a Labour government."

There were two main things that attracted me to what the Socialist Party—or the SPGB as it was then widely known—was saying. One was that it presented incontrovertible evidence that the Labour Party, in or out of power, supported capitalism in more or less the same way that the Conservative Party did. The other was that capitalism, with all its problems of inequality, boom and bust, war, the priority of profit over need is not inevitable. It can be replaced by a better system—socialism—when a majority of people decide to do so.

Revolution isn't just a matter of destroying capitalism—the new system has to be put in its place. This poses a problem for the Socialist Party. Socialism isn't something that can be promised to be introduced after the next election. All the other parties don't want electors to understand and want revolutionary change—they offer only minor revisions of the same basic system and insist that if you don't choose one of them you are wasting your vote. You are not. You don't have to choose the least of two or more evils. You can take the long view and choose to help build the kind of world you really want.

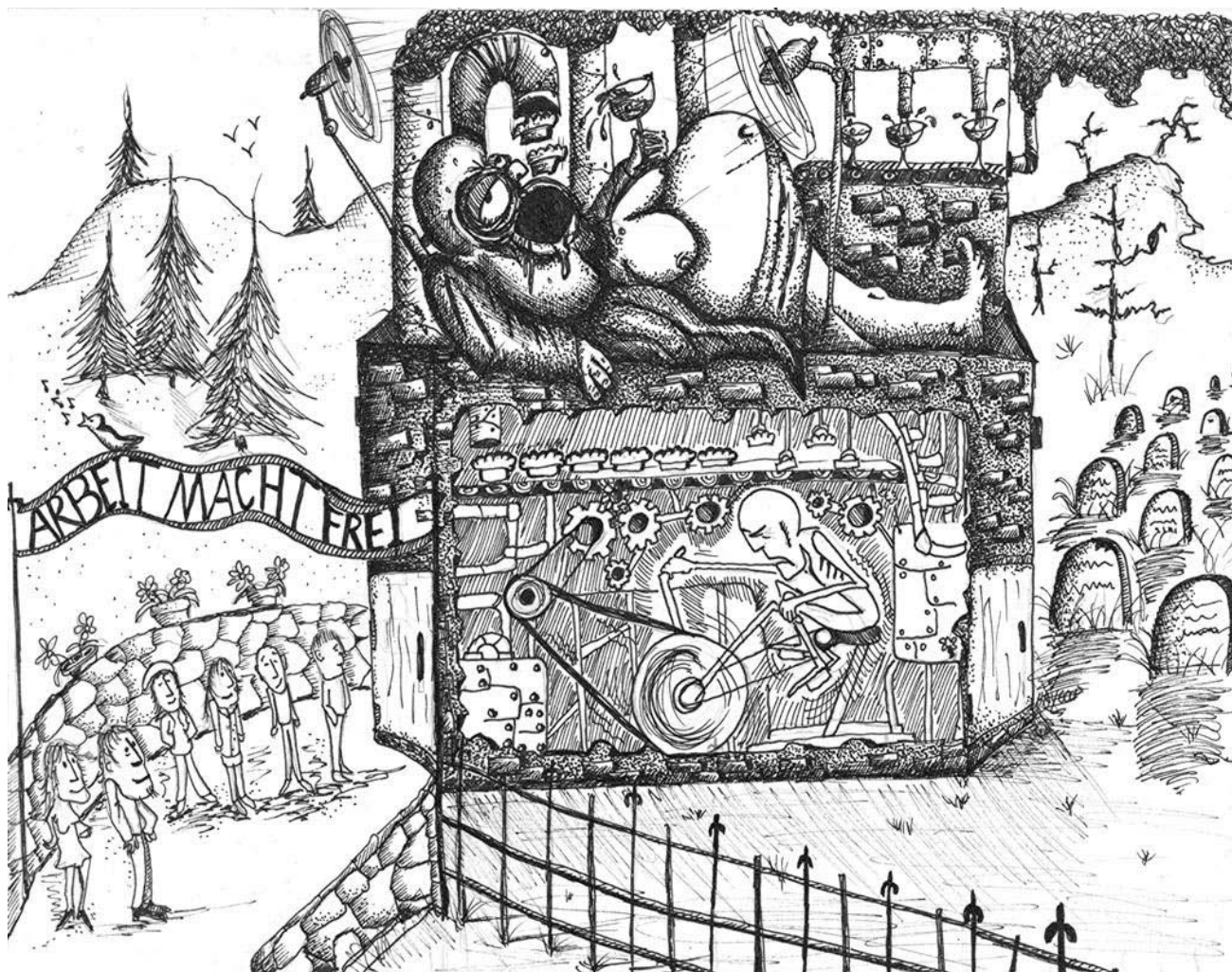
My introduction to socialist ideas included trying to get to grips with the writings of classic socialists. Frankly, I found much of Marx hard going, though I liked his inspirational "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (despite its sexist language).

For me the outstanding socialist book was and is William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. I don't agree with everything in it. I'm no fan of 14th-century costume, and I certainly don't think his forecast of "How the change came" is remotely likely (a Trafalgar Square massacre, a Committee of Public Safety, general strike, etc.).

However, *Nowhere* is of great value in painting a picture of what the future can be in terms of how people treat and relate to each other. Today there is giving and taking, but only within our economic and political system based on buying and selling. Morris shows how changing that system to socialism will extend the scope of giving and taking from family and small-group life to society as a whole.

STAN PARKER

The World Around You



Someone employs you, and you work for them, and they control a big part of your waking hours.

Look around you at the world you live in. You may live in a scenic but desperately dull village, or in a lively but overcrowded city. You travel to your work, which is a mixture of routine and interest, and you enjoy a drink and a laugh with your work colleagues. Or you stay at home, concentrating on housework and childcare. Or you wish you could find a job but there are far more people searching for work than there are jobs. Most of the time you have enough money to keep your head above water and take a holiday once a year. But you know that your job is not all that secure, and a couple of your neighbours have been sacked in the last few months, as a result of the recession, and you realise that the same fate might await you or your partner.

You read the paper and watch the TV news, so you are well aware of the problems in the outside world. In fact, there seems to be little other than problems, from companies going bust and workers being laid off, to wars and riots and floods and electoral chicanery. At least, you think to yourself, it's not as bad here as it is there

(where 'there' might be any number of countries). You know that things are bad, but you're too busy with work and family to do much about it, and in any case you don't really have much idea as to what can be done. Putting a different political party in power doesn't appear to make much difference, and maybe none at all. Some of the people you work with blame immigrants, or Muslims, or scroungers, or the unions, but you appreciate that these are just scapegoats, latched on to by those who want a simple fix but have no real clue what's going on.

One weekend you have the chance to reflect a bit on your life, and to consider what's wrong with the world. There are many good things in your life, especially your partner and the rest of your family, and you value your friends. Yet you're worried about your future: will you still have a job in five or ten years' time, will you still be able to afford a holiday and new clothes and furniture, might you even lose your home if things really take a turn for the worse? The internet, cheap flights, high-definition TV, these are all very well, but they aren't really what make

someone happy, because you just don't feel in control of your life and your future.

Then you start to look at things in a wider perspective. You come to realise that most people manage to battle through the day, to get through their dull jobs and accept what their boss says while silently telling him or her to get lost. They look forward to their two weeks' holiday and their time off at Christmas, in the knowledge that job cuts and a pay freeze may be round the corner. You soon accept that most people are unhappy with a great deal about their lives, and you start to wonder why this might be.

First you think about work and employment, and you discover that these aren't quite the same. You enjoy the voluntary work you do at a local sports club, and get a lot of satisfaction from it, yet you don't feel the same way about the job that brings in your wages. That's basically what it is, a job to earn money. Once you had visions of a worthwhile career, but now you see that it just means working ever harder and accepting more responsibility and never truly being in charge of your work time. Others may have it worse – in jobs that are physically unpleasant and even dangerous – but yours is unrewarding except in financial terms, and even the pay isn't as good as you were promised. Someone employs you, and you work for them, and they control so much of your waking hours. It's not so much your manager as the big boss and other shareholders who own the company and take the profits. They, you decide, are the people who benefit from your labours.

Then you start thinking about your time outside the hours of work, where you spend the money you've worked so hard for. You're still paying off your mortgage and it takes a big chunk of your monthly cheque, but at least you aren't in negative equity or about to have your home repossessed. It would only take a month or two of unemployment, though, to leave you and your family in a very difficult situation. You become aware, too, that many people have real housing problems: their place is overcrowded or unsanitary, or they are homeless or sleeping on a friend's sofa. But on your journey into work you see building sites that have closed down, as there is no way the houses and flats will be sold in the recession. And you realise that there is something drastically wrong when people are homeless or living in slums yet others who could be building homes for them are on the dole. The idea of profit rears its head again, and you see that houses and flats are built to make a profit for someone, rather than to provide places to live.

And profits seem to govern many other areas of life too. Cheap food at the supermarket is there not because

anyone wants to buy it but because that's all some can afford to buy and cheap stuff is the only way that a profit can be made by selling to the poorest. A light begins to go on in your head, and you can see that much of what is produced is poor quality, intended to be sold cheaply and still bring in a profit, so it's often dangerous as well as shoddy.

Then you start to wonder about who benefits from the profits made as a result of all this labour and production. You already know about millionaires and heiresses and the landed aristocracy, and now you see that they are the ones who benefit. With their multi-room mansions, private jets and luxury yachts, they don't suffer from the same problems that you and your friends and relations do. You haven't quite worked out how they got rich, but you're sure that it didn't happen through their own hard work: nobody can work that hard, and your own parents worked hard all their lives and ended up with very little.

And other countries are no different, not in important respects anyway. Things vary a bit of course, but there are still problems of poverty and homelessness, while a few live very nicely, thank you. On your holidays abroad you've seen that the same problems as here exist more or less everywhere. And some parts of the world are far worse off, with famines and wars and heaven knows what. You aren't sure of all the facts, but you've heard that even famine-stricken countries usually produce plenty of food, it's just that the poor can't afford to buy it, so it's mostly exported. And wars often seem to be fought in areas with rich or potentially rich natural resources, and you wonder if that's the real reason for them taking place.

All in all, you have come to see that the world is dominated by profit, and that a relatively small number of people, the owners, benefit in terms of wealth and power. The way things are run, you decide, needs to be changed. You think about it a bit and, while you don't have anything like a full-scale plan in your mind, you do have some general ideas about how things should be arranged. There shouldn't be this division into the rich and everyone else, and people should not have to be employed by others. It might even be like the sports club where you help out: everybody mucks in and contributes in their own way, without there being a boss or wages. You still don't have a proper notion of what should replace what exists now, but the more you think about it, the more you become convinced that some new way of organising the world would be a big step forward.

Then one day, outside your local library, you see someone selling the *Socialist Standard* ...

PAUL BENNETT

Too good to be true

We are conditioned to accept the absurdities and contradictions that capitalism throws up.

It is possible now to build a world where every single human being is adequately provided with the material means of a full and happy life in a truly meaningful democratic society; where there is no such thing as world hunger; where wars and armaments no longer exist; where all have access to the knowledge and information they desire and where the system of rich and poor, the brutal class system that alienates human beings from one another, is a historical memory.

Actually that statement is not correct. It is not possible to create such a world now because *one feature* essential in its creation does not exist. In order to

discern the missing element in a world of such promise it would be useful to examine the components that would be required to make a reality of what, from our present perspective, must seem like a dream world.

First we might look at the physical requirements of the world we are considering; is there the means, real or potential, to create the enormous quantities of food and other materials to provide sufficiency for all? To answer that question we must look at how wealth is produced now and how it would be produced in the world we are considering.

One thing is common to the

“The terrible effects of breakdowns in the productive and distributive process clearly show that neither national identity or political labelling offers protection from global capitalism’s trade cycles.”

production of wealth in whatever form of society we live in: it is produced from the resources of nature by human labour power whether, as in the past, by a human hand or, as now or in the future, by the most advanced technological means. However, the factors that currently determine what is produced and how it is distributed would differ fundamentally in the society we are considering from those that obtain today.

Current economic crisis

We could not make this point more graphically than by referring to the current chapter in the cyclic crisis which our present mode of production has thrown up.

These crises, which cause an intensification of poverty through unemployment and most often the restricting or slashing of vital public services, are an inevitable result of the *normal* capitalist way of organising the production and distribution of wealth. The terrible effects of these breakdowns in the productive and distributive process of what is increasingly a globally integrated system are usually, as now, world-wide and, given that the countries affected are governed by parties right across the political spectrum, from Right to Left clearly shows that neither national identity or political labelling offers protection from global capitalism’s trade cycles.

By looking briefly at ‘the Credit

Crunch’ – the media’s sobriquet for the latest in slumps – we can discern why millions of people have lost their jobs, why political parties are making policies out of which set of politicians will be least savage in cutting social welfare ‘benefits’ including health care and education. The wealth-producing equation (the providence of nature plus human labour power) is the same now as it was three or four years ago when, in capitalist terms, the economy was flourishing. As then, both the human factor and the material potential of nature remain available; there is no *physical* bar to full production not only to its previous levels but to the levels required to provide adequately for every human being on the planet within the system we are contemplating. Why then is there such a dramatic slowdown in the production of human needs which, in turn is expressed in massive increases of unemployment and poverty within the working class?

Legal right

The answer clearly is the motive currently underpinning the production of goods and services and that motive arises from the fact of ownership. Legally the great majority of the world’s

population have no right to the food, clothing and shelter they need in order to continue to exist as human beings. That sounds an utterly outrageous statement to make but it is quite clearly demonstrated by the fact that the means of life, the resources of nature, and the tools of production and distribution are legally owned by a relatively small minority class of people who generally enjoy rich lives of wealth and privilege based on the profits they extract from their ownership.

If you lived in an area of the world where death frequently occurs from malnutrition or lack of necessary

medication you would *know* that what is said in the foregoing is true. You would know that the victims of hunger and preventable disease are people who are unable to get the food or medicine they desperately need to sustain their lives not because the means to satisfy these needs are

not available but because they do not have the money to buy them.

In more politically and economically sophisticated countries such evidence is less evident. Nevertheless, the things that people need are directly or indirectly the property of the capitalist class and are released by way of sale with a view to profit. In other words, goods and services are produced in the form of commodities for the market and, generally, will not be produced if a viable market does not exist.

Obviously minority ownership of our means of life, either directly or through the state, could *not* form the basis of the politically and economically free society mooted at the beginning of this article. To achieve that it is necessary to abolish the legal framework on which minority ownership of our means of life is based; which means we need to bring about a democratic social revolution to get control of the law-making process vested in government.

Achieving control of government throughout the world for the purpose of establishing a system of common ownership in which everyone has the freedom to contribute their physical and mental skills to the production of the needs of their society and all have the right to freely avail of their individual needs will be a monumental task of

“Legally the great majority of the world’s population have no right to food, clothing and shelter.”



**Capitalism and wealth for all -
the real castle in the air**



political and social organisation. Its achievement will require a vast and willing effort in social co-operation on the part of humanity and yet looked at against our collective skills and wisdom it is a relatively simply job – always provided that we have the collective will to bring it about.

That collective will is the single factor we referred to at the commencement of this article; the single prevailing condition that stands between us and a world where civilised history will begin. A world without the greed and savage competition that breeds conflict, alienation and war; a world where our collective energies are directed to the nurture of ourselves and our planet. That collective will is the political consciousness that will bring about what we clearly define as Socialism.

The really hard bit

Most people today do not question the organisation and value systems behind the way we live. From an early age we learn that when we need something we have to pay for it either directly or indirectly or else, however

essential it is to our health or happiness, we have to do without it. At an early age we commence our 'education', a process orientated towards inculcating the beliefs and values of the world we live in; its morality, its inflexible system of social organisation and how to compete for a place in the pecking order.

Effectively we are conditioned to accept the absurdities and contradictions that capitalism throws up. In our daily relations with one another we can identify and condemn those contradictions but when, as we are now doing, it is suggested that we should consider another way of organising the affairs of humanity the armour of rejection too often comes into play; the belief that we who run the world for the capitalists cannot run a considerably less complicated and rational alternative world society for

ourselves.

The really hard bit is the beginning: simply considering that it might not be too good to be true.

RICHARD MONTAGUE

“Collective will is the single factor that stands between us and a world where civilised history will begin.”



Free is good

Journalist, broadcaster and author Libby Purves chose the day that the London *Evening Standard* became a free, give-away paper to launch an attack on the whole idea of people having free access to things. Under the headline “If the future’s worth having, it won’t be free”, she laid into the “internet generation” which “has grown up believing it can enjoy other people’s hard work for nothing. This has got to stop” (*Times*, 12 October).

We socialists would say that, on the contrary, “if we’re going to have to pay for everything, the future is not worth having”. The resources exist today to produce enough food, clothes, housing, transport and health care so that no one on the planet needs to starve or be malnourished, or go without clean water, or live in slums, or not have access to the medicines and treatment they need. Society could go over to the principle of “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”, with everybody having access to what they need without having to pay in return for contributing what they can to the work of producing what is needed.

This, surely, is a better future than the continued application of the opposite principle of “can’t pay, can’t have”? Which means that in some parts of the world people die from starvation or easily preventable disease, or exist in shanty towns on the outskirts of big cities. And that, all over the world, most people are deprived of something which would improve their lives and which could easily be provided. Where we can’t build adequate public infrastructures or install anti-pollution technologies because it would “cost too much”.

And what is wrong with the “internet generation” taking for granted that “music, films, news, photographs, cartoons and carefully researched or creative prose” should be available for free? Isn’t this a sign that the money-wages-profit system that is capitalism has outlived its usefulness and perhaps also a sign of the beginning of a consciousness that it needs to be replaced by a system in which people have free access to what they need?

Purves is defending her vested interest as a royalty-reaping author. That’s understandable as, under capitalism, people need money to live and that’s how she gets hers. It might be thought, though, that as a public intellectual she’d be more broad-minded than to judge an economic system by whether or not it ensures her her chosen source of income.

In pleading her cause she goes back to the labour theory of property first put forward by John Locke in the 17th century:

“Content is not cost free. Writing is work. Musicianship involves cost and labour, art is not innately free, nor the infrastructure of news reporting. Until food, clothes, housing and transport are doled out free, content-makers need to be paid”.

And, according to her, the way to ensure this is through “intellectual property rights”, even if these are difficult, not to say impossible, to enforce in some cases.

But she does at least concede that if “food, clothes, housing and transport” were free - which will be the case in socialism - so should watching films or listening to music or reading a book, on the internet. As these will be too in socialism. The future is free.



Debating the “S-Word”

Is any word more over-used and misunderstood today than “socialism”?

In the United States, the “S-word” appears in almost every other sentence uttered by Republicans, who depict the Democratic Party as marching – or at least creeping – towards socialism.

“Socialist” has replaced “liberal” in their vocabulary as an insult to hurl at political opponents, while the meaning remains unchanged as a term to indicate an advocate of government intervention in production and the social infrastructure.

Everything from Keynesianism to Communism (= state capitalism) falls under this blanket definition, which means that Republicans must feel terribly outnumbered by their socialist foes. If Republicans didn't seem to relish that paranoid feeling, which certainly helps to rally the Party faithful, we could point out to them that socialists are in fact a rather rare breed at this point in time. Although that would also require explaining how our concept of socialism has nothing in common with their understanding of the term.

Of course, if the distortion of socialism were limited to the world of Republican ideologues it would hardly matter – as their ideas are not taken all that seriously, even by themselves. But the fact is that many of the supposed proponents of socialism share that same mistaken view of what socialism means.

The controversy between the pro- and anti-socialists is just a sterile debate over the extent to which the government should “intervene” in the capitalist economy – with neither side advocating or even fathoming a *post-capitalist* society.

One recent example of how both sides share a common misassumption was a debate on the website of the *New York Times* regarding the topic: “What

is Socialism in 2009?” This mouthpiece of the capitalist class solicited the opinions of a small number of supposed experts, for the most part university professors.

Without exception, these reputable figures shared the notion that “socialism” fundamentally concerns an economic system in which the government plays a key role in production. Following this line of thought, any aspect of society involving government intervention, regulation or management can be described as “socialistic”. This allowed those experts to attach that adjective to everything from public health care and education to highways and the armed forces. Stretched to this point, the concept of socialism loses all meaning – it is used to describe too much and ends up elucidating nothing.

Some participants in the on-line debate did try to offer a more essential definition of socialism as “public ownership and/or control of the major means of production (mines, mills, factories, etc.) for the benefit of the public at large” or “central economic planning and public ownership of the means of production”. But even those more precise definitions are basically descriptions of state capitalist systems – not any sort of post-capitalist society that exists beyond production for profit.

None of the debate participants describe socialism as a money-free society where production is democratically organised to meet human needs, displacing today's production for the market. Nor did anyone even suggest that the state would have no room to exist in that class-free society of the future.

There are simply no points in common between our conception of socialism and the view of socialism that currently prevails – and with regard to the role of the state the views are in fact polar opposites.

Some might argue, then, that we should let the reformists and reactionaries twist around the word “socialism” to their heart's content, while choosing a different term to describe the new society we are aiming to realise – some word less marked by confusion.

Karl Marx used the word “Association” to indicate the society he envisaged as replacing capitalism. And this term is useful in terms of emphasizing how the members of that society will freely enter into production relations with each other to produce social wealth. One obvious drawback, not to be overlooked, is that it would be rather awkward to describe oneself as “Associator” or “Associatist”.

But even if the World Socialist Movement comes up with the perfect word to replace “socialism” it would not necessarily bring us any closer to our ultimate goal, for our task as socialists is to convince our fellow workers that capitalism has got to go and that there is in fact an alternative. One word alone, no matter how well chosen, cannot accomplish all of that. The key point is the concept or content of the future society as the solution to the social problems we face under capitalism, not the word used to indicate that new mode of production.

It may very well happen that a word other than socialism emerges out of the movement for the new money-free society. And it would be absurd in that situation to be a word-fetishist who clings to the word “socialism” as if it were the principle or concept itself.

But it is also quite possible that the growth of the revolutionary movement will breathe new life into the word socialism, freeing it from the connotations it has been burdened with by those who cannot see beyond capitalism.

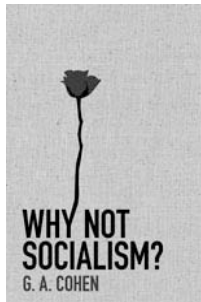
The task is the same in either case: revealing the limits and contradictions of capitalism and explaining how socialism (or whatever it may one day be called) resolves the problems that are irresolvable as long as that capitalist system prevails.

It is certainly annoying that the word “socialism” is almost invariably misused today, but the current over-use of the term may bring unexpected results, even encouraging the curious to begin pondering what a truly post-capitalist society could look like.

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE

Market analyst

Why not socialism? By G. A. Cohen. Princeton University Press, 2009.



This pocket-size 83-page book is easy to read and it's easy to agree with some of what the author writes. But it's hard to see him as he no doubt saw himself (he died in August just before

the book came out): someone who understands the different between capitalism and socialism.

First the positive things in the book. These mostly centre around Cohen's critical remarks about some aspects of capitalism: "I give as little service as I can in exchange for as much service as I can get: I want to buy cheap and sell dear". And although he favours market 'socialism' he does recognise how similar it is to market capitalism: "exchange under market socialism is no less market exchange than it is under capitalism".

Now the longer list of things to disagree with: "it is a familiar socialist policy to insist on equality of both income and hours of work". No, that isn't a socialist policy. In socialism there won't be (money) incomes or insistence that we all work the same hours.

Cohen claims that socialism is infeasible "even if people are, or could become, in the right culture, sufficiently generous, we do not know how to harness that generosity: we do not know how, through appropriate rules and stimuli, to make generosity turn the wheels of the economy". In socialism we shall treat each other as fellow humans not as commodities. It has nothing to do with harnessing generosity or turning the wheels of the economy.

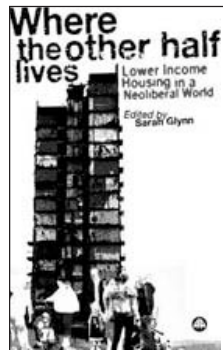
"Market socialism does not fully satisfy socialist standards of distributive justice, but it scores far better by those standards than market capitalism does, and is therefore an eminently worthwhile project, from a socialist point of view." No, it isn't.

To sum up, Cohen writes of "We socialists." But he should really say "We 'market socialists' who muddy the water about what socialism means..."

SRP

Full House

Where the Other Half Lives: Lower Income Housing in a Neoliberal World. Sarah Glynn, ed. Pluto Press £16.99.



Social housing (also known by various other names, especially council housing) has generally been aimed at workers on below-average incomes, though its

extent has varied from country to country. This book studies the effects on social housing of the implementation of 'neoliberal' policies, which involve the partial dismantling of the welfare state and of Keynesian government initiatives. Its particular strength is its coverage of developments in a number of countries.

In the UK the 1890 Housing Act made it easier for local authorities to build and manage houses, though these were still expected to make a profit. A further act of 1919 allowed for government subsidies but was seen as a temporary measure in the immediate post-war period. It was not until the mid-twenties that a major programme of building council houses began. Social housing has generally been regarded as subordinate to the private sector, and as too expensive for the very poorest, who were forced into privately-rented slums. Housing associations may have started as self-help organisations, but are now just part of the whole housing industry.

Social housing has been more widespread in Scotland than in England, and once housed over half the population. Stock transfers and demolitions, however, have drastically reduced this figure. A chapter on the recent situation in Dundee notes that only one-fifth of houses there are currently council-owned, there is a backlog of over six thousand homes, and only two hundred new council homes are built each year.

The proportion of home ownership in France is considerably lower than in Britain. In 2008, more than one million French people were classed as homeless and over two million as poorly housed, with six million

at risk of losing their homes for one reason or another. As might be expected, the US has never had more than a marginal role for social housing. Under neoliberalism, even this has been scaled back, with houses demolished and tenants given vouchers that can be accepted by private landlords, but inevitably private rents are driven up and people are forced to live further out in cities.

Of course there have been various forms of resistance, such as rent strikes and the tent cities set up in Paris and other French towns. Sadly, these can do little to alter the fact that under capitalism, whatever the role of social housing and the state, decent and secure housing is unavailable to large numbers of workers. Neither Keynesian nor neoliberal policies can deliver good-quality affordable homes. And a lot of council housing is shoddy and badly-designed.

In our review copy one batch of pages was bound upside-down. Possibly an unintended comment on the topsy-turvy priorities of housing under capitalism.

PB

Free

Free. The Future of a Radical Price. By Chris Anderson. Random House. 2009. £18.99.



"What happens when advances in technology allow many things to be produced for more or less nothing? And what happens when those things are then made available

to the consumer for free?" asks the publicity for this (paying) book by the editor of *Wired*. His answer is not that this is the beginning of some sort of transition towards a system where eventually all goods and services will be available free of charge (which it isn't anyway). It's that profit-seeking enterprises involved in these things have to adopt, have adopted and will increasingly adopt, a different marketing strategy.

Thus, enterprises in that line of business can choose to give away free DVDs and charge for DVD-players or they can give away free DVD-players

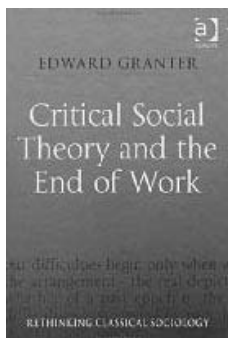
and charge for DVDs, in either case covering their costs and making a profit.

It is, as Anderson explains, a modern version of the strategy adopted by saloon owners in New Orleans in the 1880s. They offered customers free lunches banking on them buying drinks priced so as to cover the cost of the lunches. Hence the saying "there's no such thing as a free lunch". Today – and it will be the case as long as capitalism lasts – there's no such thing either as a free DVD or a free paper or a free mobile. Those giving them away will be recuperating the cost from something else that they are selling.

Still, it can't be bad that there are books discussing things being free.
ALB

End of work?

Critical Social Theory and the End of Work. By Edward Granter. Ashgate, 2009. £55.



The main theme of this book (adapted from a PhD thesis) is that work is being eliminated through the use of advanced production technology. The Critical

Social Theory in the title refers to the publications of the Frankfurt School (notably Adorno, Horkheimer, Lowenthal and Marcuse) but the views on work of other critical social theorists such as Marx and Gorz are also included.

Sensibly Granter devotes a few pages to definitions of work, but the results are disappointing. The author wastes space telling us that someone thinks work is "picking something up and putting it down somewhere else because you have to". Gorz is more helpful in pointing out that "work" nowadays refers almost exclusively to activities carried out for a wage". Curiously Granter writes of work hundreds of times but hardly mentions employment. He doesn't seem at all clear that although all employment involves work, not all work is employment.

The chapter on utopians and the end of work summarises what More, Fourier and the little-known Etzber had to say on the subject. Apparently Etzber thought that the

'powers in nature' (wind, solar, tidal energy) could be developed to replace all human labour. The two pages devoted to William Morris correctly note that his *News From Nowhere* was a reaction to Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, but the fail to convey much of the richness of Morris's imagination about what work will be like in socialist society.

Granter's discussion of Marx quotes from no less than 14 of his works and the author believes there are "many Marxisms". He confuses the issue by referring to "the erstwhile superpower that many saw as operating on Marxist principles..." It is also misleading to say that "The idea of the end of work is at the centre of Marx's vision of a future society..." Granter is however on stronger ground when he writes that Marx was not in any way against work and did advocate its "radical transformation".

Prior to a short concluding section, the final chapter is about globalisation and work. This is by far the most opinionated and forceful chapter, offering the most devastating critique of capitalism. Starting with Marx's "It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connection everywhere," Granter goes on to show that the impetus for globalisation "comes primarily from the need of the expanding capitalist system to maximise profit". The worst victims are Britain's underpaid, easy to sack, second class workforce of migrant labour, 'a world of gangmasters, zero hour contracts, the minimum wage [or less] and eventually no employment rights.'
SRP

Workers' education

Plebs. By Colin Waugh, Post-16 Educator. 221 Firth Park Road, Sheffield S5 6WW. £3

This large-size pamphlet is misleadingly subtitled 'The lost legacy of independent working-class education', giving the impression that it deals with a larger subject than it actually does. As an account of the Ruskin strike of 1909, it is a useful summary, giving extensive background to the decision of the highly politicised Ruskin students to boycott lectures in defence of Dennis Hird, the Principal dismissed in the struggle to extend University control over the college. There is a section on the influence of Daniel De Leon

on some of the students and on the choice of the word "Plebs" (from his pamphlet *Two Pages of Roman History*).

However, rather more information would have been appreciated as to the results of the strike – namely the establishment of the Central Labour College as a radical alternative to Ruskin and what became the National Council of Labour Colleges as a riposte to the Workers Education Association. The fate of these organisations, namely withdrawal of funds by the trade unions, is particularly important because the author asserts a need for 'independent working class education' in the present day. We in the Socialist Party agree that it is necessary to understand all aspects of capitalism in order to bring about social change but point out that such education cannot be the work of defensive organisations such as trade unions but must be part and parcel of the work of the offensive political organisation of the working class.

KAZ

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



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Meetings

London Winter Film Programme

Sundays at 6pm at 52 Clapham High St. London SW4

13 December: *Earthlings* (Animals and economic interests - 95 mins)

17 January: *Manufacturing Consent* (part one) (Noam Chomsky & the Media)

31 January: *Manufacturing Consent* (part two)

London

Tuesday 15 December, 8pm
CAPITALISM AND THE ARCTIC
DVD of talk by Glen Morris of Arctic Voice
Committee room, Chiswick Town Hall,
Heathfield Terrace, W4 (nearest tube:
Chiswick Park).

Tuesday 22 December, 7.30pm
WEST LONDON BRANCH SEASONAL
SOCIAL
Barley Mow, Chiswick High Road, W4
(opposite Boots).

EAST ANGLIA
Saturday 12 December. 12noon to 4pm
Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec St.
Norwich.

ADVANCE NOTICE:

Debate with Dr Eamonn Butler of the Adam
Smith Institute
Thursday, 4th February, 2010 at 7.00pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London.
WC1

Picture Credits

p2: Bill and Melinda Gates - www.
houstonwehaveproblems.com
p5: Fromm - www.makara.us
p10: Tramp sketch: Marie Chesham (SPGB)
p11: Rough sleeper - www.mungos.org
p12: Homeless woman - bestredunderthebed.
wordpress.com
p13: Man with food - www.uncdf.org
p15: Arbeit macht frei - Jim Haygood (WSPUS)
p24: Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons - bnp.org.uk

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Second thoughts



"Yesterday's Enemy" is a recently-produced British film about the British army fighting the Japanese in Burma during the last war. A review in the *Daily Herald* (14.9.59) describes a sequence in it:—

"A British captain . . . has captured an informer who, he believes, has vital knowledge of a forthcoming Japanese attack. He threatens the informer with death, but the informer thinks the captain is bluffing and refuses to talk. The captain picks two villagers at random and orders them to be shot. The informer still refuses to talk. The villagers are shot—and then the informer breaks down. The captain has his information."

The captain follows up his murder of two innocent villagers by having the informer shot, as well.

Remembering the propaganda with which we were spoon-fed in the last war, about how we were fighting for decency and humanity against the brutality of the other side, you might think

that nothing like this could ever have been done by anyone in the British army. But not a bit of it. Major-General A. J. H. Snelling, who was with the 14th Army in Burma said: "I believe incidents like this did happen during the grim retreat." General Sir Douglas Gracey said: "I heard of similar incidents . . . These awkward situations did arise." Major-General H. L. Davies said: "This film is absolutely real and authentic." A fourth high-ranking officer, General Sir Robert Mansergh, was due to speak the film's praises at its New York premiere.

Very honest of them, now, fourteen years after the war has ended. And no one alleges that war can be fought with clean hands. But why did the politicians and generals tell us throughout the war that all the brutality was on the other side?

(From "The Passing Show" by Alwyn Edgar, *Socialist Standard*, December 1959.)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

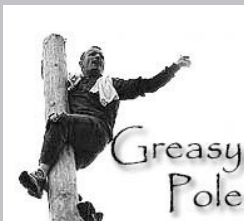
the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



BNP – Question Time Without Answers

WE WERE promised that it would be as entertaining and as cleansing as a mediaeval execution, with the prisoner ritually humiliated then swiftly finished off by the muscular man with the axe. But the BBC's *Question Time* on 29 October last was less watchable than that because, while condemned man Nick Griffin of the British National Party was surprisingly unprepared for the predictable lines of attack on him, his appointed tormentors on the panel – like Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor Jack Straw and Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesman Chris Huhne – were similarly feeble. The announcement that the BBC had invited Griffin to take part in the programme provoked a storm of protest avowedly because the BNP, for its racism and nostalgia for the Holocaust, is in the line of descent from the Nazis. If that argument had been sustained, it would have provided ammunition enough to liquidate Griffin but in the event what was substituted was little more than a sample of mob hysteria. Perhaps that suited the purposes of the BBC, embarrassed by the protests and anxious to validate their anti-fascist credentials. It would also explain why Question Master David Dimbleby ran the event with no pretence at being impartial; indeed, by confronting Griffin with inconvenient quotes and facts he emerged as something like the BNP's most effective opponent. Which means that, as an example of the frustration of rabble politics, the programme left us with some unanswered questions.

Fascism

The programme was not at all helpful in answering questions about the nature of the BNP. To begin with, Griffin denies that it is fascist – just as groups like the Union for British Freedom and the British League of Ex-Servicemen, which in the immediate post-war years sprang from the ruins of Mosley's British Union of Fascists, argued that fascism was out of date when their concept of the future lay with European Union. Griffin also shows symptoms – in public at any rate – of an unclear attitude to racism. In 1993 the BNP Deputy Leader agreed that "We are 100 percent racist, yes" but this policy has been somewhat modified by Griffin into "ethno nationalism" – which in other circumstances, bearing in mind the reputation of some BNP members, could be as menacing as a "final solution". Discussing the Holocaust, Griffin is on record as concluding that "...the 'extermination' tale is a mixture of Allied wartime propaganda, extremely profitable lie, and latter witch-hysteria" – the kind of statement the origins of which, under pressure from Dimbleby, he said he could not understand. The common thread in all this apparent confusion is Griffin's policy of trying to improve the BNP's electoral prospects by extreme modifying their more enforced example tendencies, for become the policy of incentives for voluntary repatriation has one of "firm but incentives for"

**Andrew Brons
and Nick Griffin**

immigrants and their descendants to return home".

Elections

As things stand, he can claim some success. The BNP has the organisation to nominate hundreds of candidates in local elections; in 2007 there were 754 of them and at the end of that year after resignations, expulsions and the like, they held 42 seats. In May 2008 they won a seat in the London Assembly and in last year's Euro Elections Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons polled enough votes to see them elected – which apart from other things led to Griffin being invited to take part in *Any Questions*. Unsurprisingly, the BNP gained from the Westminster expenses scandal, which encouraged outraged voters to look outside the established parties in the unsupported belief that somewhere, somehow there were others who would behave differently if they were in power. And that goes some way to explain the appeal of the BNP and to what success they have so far had – the impression they promote that, among the turmoil and cupidity of the other parties they alone make themselves aware of the complaints and concerns in the everyday, persistent struggles of the working class. In April 2006 Margaret Hodge, MP for Barking (a paid-up, devoted member of the New Labour Islington Tony Blair Fan Club) told the *Sunday Telegraph* that 8 out of ten white workers in her constituency may be tempted to vote for the BNP in the coming local elections – because "no one else is listening to them" about unemployment, high house prices and the like. She was strongly criticised for these remarks, which may have been linked to her helpful advice to some sacked MG Rover workers to look for jobs at the local Tesco. Meanwhile the BNP saluted their success in winning 12 of the 13 seats they contested by gratefully delivering her a bunch of roses. The only valid response to this evidence of the poisonous results of combining political confusion with prejudice was that the last thing needed by workers in their struggles is advice or sympathy from politicians.

Lies

The other members of the *Question Time* panel – and a clear majority of the audience – seemed to have proceeded from the assumption that if the BNP had a case it was too feeble – ill-constructed, chaotically developed, driven by malice – to be worth any serious attention. Instead, their comments were moulded from a mix of sweeping assertions and straightforward abuse, on the lines of the BNP being "...filthy, disgusting..." Perhaps this was their method of evading the truth that organisations like the BNP – discriminatory, repressive, as brutal as they wished to be – appeal to voters who are in despair at the manipulative impotence and deceit of the other parties. So Jack Straw sat blathering before the cameras in denial of his government's miserable failure to deal with the social scars of recession, poverty, crime and capitalism's persistent waste of human talents. He did not acknowledge that their making war on Iraq and Afghanistan was based on purposive lies. Their wretched failure invalidates the claims of all capitalism's political parties to be an effective opposition against the likes of the BNP. We have heard enough of such questions; we need some answers.

IVAN



End Of A Dream

Ever since the publication of his *Unsafe at Any Speed* in 1965 Ralph Nader has been the darling of radical circles in the USA. Here was a man who dared to question the power of such capitalist concerns as General Motors. He went on to found scores of progressive non-profit organisations. He even ran as a Green Party and later an Independent candidate for the President of the USA. On one occasion he even polled almost 3 million votes. Capitalism however is a resilient social system and his attempt at reforming capitalism has ended up with him looking to the capitalists to solve the problems. He is on tour at present to promote his first fictional book entitled *Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us*. This has led some of his former supporters to doubt his reasoning. "There is a poignancy in listening to Ralph Nader these days. Here is a man who, for the last 45 years, has hurled his body at the engine of corporate power. He's dented it more than anyone else in America. But he knows it's still chugging, even more strongly than ever. Nader understands that he's losing. He understands that we're losing—we who believe in democracy, we who care about justice. But if our only hope is with a handful of billionaires, we're in a lot worse shape than I thought." (*The Progressive*, 28 September)

How About Socialism?

As the social problems of capitalism mount up its administrators have to be seen to be doing something. The usual drill in the past has been for world leaders to meet together usually in some splendid hotel or other, make pious noises about "something has to be done", pat each other on the back

and fly home first class in a glow of self-satisfaction. The most recent crisis of world hunger has occasioned another useless backscratching summit. "With food prices remaining high in developing countries, the United Nations estimates that the number of hungry people around the world could increase by 100 million in 2009 and pass the one billion mark. A summit of world leaders in Rome scheduled for November will set an agenda for ways to reduce hunger and increase investment in agriculture development in poor countries. What will drive the next Green Revolution? Is genetically modified food an answer to world hunger? Are there other factors that will make a difference in food production?" (*New York Times*,



26 October) The one factor that they have not taken in to consideration is not yet another summit at a higher and higher level, but a sump level meeting of the world's working class. Only by such a movement as the World Socialist Movement can men and women abolish for ever the madness of millions starving to keep a system of robbery and exploitation intact. The journalist asks the question "Are there other factors that will make a difference in food production?" Yes there is - world socialism and production solely for use! That is one issue that won't be discussed in Rome.

Capitalism Is Gangsterism

Politicians and clergymen and even well-paid TV personalities will claim that the Middle East conflict has something to do with morality and justice and that it has nothing to do with crass consideration such as "making a couple of bucks" as Al Capone once famously said. "The British oil giant BP will today take control of Iraq's biggest oilfield in the first important energy deal since the 2003 invasion. The move has created uproar among local politicians invoking resentful memories of their nation's colonial past. The agreement to develop the Rumaila field, near the southern city of Basra, will potentially put Iraq on the path to rivaling the riches of Saudi Arabia within a decade — if the Government can fend off corrupt officials, continuing terrorist attacks on pipelines and political uncertainty." (*Times*, 3 November) Hey, Iraq workers may continue to live in poverty, so what, we can make a couple of bucks. That is how capitalism works, isn't it Al Capone?

The New Gangsters

It used to be popular for supporters of the so-called Communist Party to decry Imperialism. They would point out how Britain had exploited Africa and India during their colonial conquests. Later on they would concentrate on the role of the USA in Central and South America. Changed days now with China investing heavily in all sorts of corrupt regimes throughout Asia and Africa. "Barely a fortnight after soldiers loyal to Guinea's military junta butchered at least 150 demonstrators calling for civilian rule, a deal for oil and mineral rights worth about \$7 billion has been struck between China and Guinea. ...It seems that China's commercial march across Africa will continue unabated, however vile the human-rights record of the government it seeks to befriend." (*Economist*, 17 October)

Free Lunch

by Rigg



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